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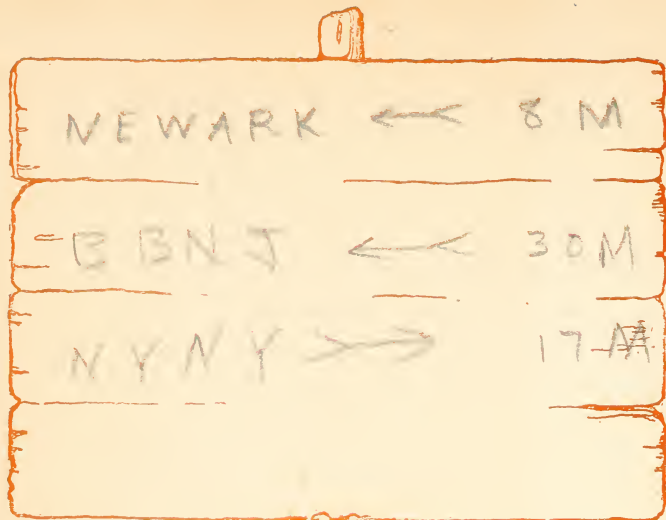


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GOLDEN ROCK



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The Golden Rock

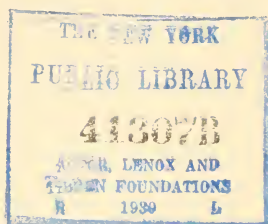
BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

AUTHOR OF

"FAMOUS AMERICAN NAVAL COMMANDERS," "JUNGLE
FUGITIVES," "OLD IRONSIDES, THE HERO OF
TRIPOLI AND 1812," ETC.

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INTRODUCTION.

HAS the thought ever occurred to you when walking the streets of a great city, that you are passing through a world of romance, of strange adventure, and of wonderful experience? Have you ever reflected that, if the secrets which are carried in the breasts of the myriads whom you meet—perhaps without a nod of recognition, were opened to the public gaze, they would prove more remarkable, more incredible indeed than the inventions of the novelist, or the flights of the wildest imagination?

The most prosaic individual, the merchant absorbed in business, the husbandman at his daily toil, the lawyer engaged with his professional duties, striving for fame, or perhaps anxious only to make a living for himself and the loved ones dependent upon his bounty, even the clerical gentleman whose energies are devoted to doing his Master's work in the great vineyard—all these have stored somewhere in

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the misty archives of the past a history, to which the multitude would listen with rapt attention and breathless interest.

I have done considerable travelling in my life, and have always made it a custom, when journeying for any great distance, to form acquaintances. Rarely if ever do I fail to gather, not only valuable knowledge, but entertaining information. I like to ride beside the stage-driver, as I once did in Texas, and listen to his account of how he was "held up" at a certain hill, which he pointed out, by the James and Younger gang; or in the smoker of the train with the cattle-men and cowboys; or in the palace car, and talk with the professional travellers and drummers. The habit not only helps to pass the hours that otherwise would become wearisome, but, as I have stated, gives one a knowledge which otherwise would never come to him.

Some months ago I made the journey from Omaha to San Francisco. On the second day out I formed the acquaintance of an elderly gentleman, who offered me a cigar as I entered the smoking compartment. During the conversation, I learned that he was a prosper-

ous merchant in the City of the Golden Gate, of which he had been a resident for nearly forty years. He was well educated, modest, but self-possessed, had a wide knowledge of the world, and especially of the plains and the Pacific Coast, and his talk was exceedingly entertaining. He professed to be interested in what I had to tell him, but I am sure it was not to be compared with what he related to me.

The odd thing about him was that several days passed, and we were nearing our destination, before he referred in any way to his most striking experience. I remarked once that those people who had crossed the continent before the day of railways must be impressed by the striking contrast.

"Yes; it never fails to move me to wonder," he replied. "I make the trip once each year, and it always stirs me as nothing else can."

"Ah, then you made the journey before the steam horse did?"

He removed his cigar from between his lips, smiled as if to himself, and, after a moment's hesitation, said, "Yes."

"When?" I persisted, knowing he had something which it was worth my while to hear.

"In '53: that was more than forty years ago. My, how time flies! It seems but a few months since, and yet I was a boy at the time."

He fell to musing, and seeing he was in a reminiscent mood, I questioned him. His answers were not very satisfying for a time, but by and by he became interested, and in the end told me his story. It was a strange history, indeed, which required several sittings before it was completed. He was a capital *raconteur*, and it was only now and then that I was obliged to ask a question. I was so struck with his narrative that I took full notes of it.

When I asked permission to make use of his experience, he said he had no objection, provided I veiled his identity. The truth was, the gentleman is such a prominent citizen of San Francisco, having twice been a member of the legislature, and holding a responsible position to-day, that he feared it might attract too much attention to him. Only his intimate friends knew his whole experience. He remarked with a laugh that though he had the best wife and finest children in the world, there were some portions which he had kept back even from them.

"I dislike that sort of publicity," he added ;
"so, if you will give me another name in what
you propose to write, why, as I have just told
you, I shall make no objection."

Accordingly, in the pages which follow, the
gentleman will figure as Richard, or rather
Dick Stoddard.

THE GOLDEN ROCK

CHAPTER I.

LOST AND FOUND.

THERE are a number of elderly people living to-day who will recall the strange fate of the Martin party, which, starting from Independence, in the autumn of 1853, for Oregon, never, reached their destination. The time of their departure was known to their friends in the East, and to others on the Pacific Coast, where they were due some four or five months later. A year passed without a word being heard of them. Then came a rumor that they had lost their way among the desolate sage plains, and all had perished. This was followed by a second report that they had fallen victims to that band of Mormon worthies known as the Destroying Angels, who, it was said, had kept a number of the smaller children, not dreaming,

as was the case with Lee and his victims of the Mountain Meadow massacre, that those same innocent ones might some day be the means of bringing the miscreants to justice.

Neither of these accounts, however, was true. Between three and four years after the disappearance of the Martin company, Dick Stoddard arrived in California with the first authentic news regarding their fate. He was the sole survivor of the company, and owed his escape to an accident, or rather to what he will always insist was one of the most remarkable providences that ever came to an individual.

The Martin party, when it started from Independence, included twelve men, eight of whom had their wives with them, besides more than a dozen children. Dick Stoddard was a youth of fifteen, without father or mother, and with no living relatives except Mr. Martin and his wife, who were his uncle and aunt. The youth was strong, sturdy, and active, and was jubilant over the prospect of the long journey across the plains, which to him indeed promised to be one continuous picnic. He owned a small, fine rifle, and a swift, good-tempered pony. He was a favorite with the company,

for his skill with his gun often enabled him to secure the choicest game, of which there was an abundance in those days.

He caused his friends much worriment, however, by his venturesome habit of riding out of sight of camp, and remaining sometimes until nightfall. The greatest danger to the early emigrants was always from Indians, who seemed to hang on the flanks of the parties, almost from the hour they were out of sight of civilization. In many an instance they cut off large parties and massacred them all, even though the defence was of the stoutest character.

Several days having passed without any sign of the red men, Dick Stoddard leaped into the saddle of his pony, and galloped off for a hunt. His uncle cautioned him to be careful not to wander beyond sight, and he promised to do so. He broke his word before he knew it, for a party of antelope drew him so far over ridges, swells of the prairies, and a small stream, that when he turned to ride back, about the middle of the afternoon, he not only failed to see anything of the line of white-topped wagons, but had lost his bearings altogether.

While hunting here and there, the sound of

distant firing was heard to the left. Galloping to the top of the nearest high ground, he made the terrifying discovery that his friends were fighting for life against an overwhelming party of Indians, who were so numerous indeed that they did not hesitate to attack openly and in daylight.

In his distress and anxiety, Dick Stoddard started to ride directly into the fray, to the help of those who were so dear to him. Before he came within gunshot, he was seen by the Indians, three of whom gave chase. Compelled to flee for his own life, he put his pony to his best paces, and the faithful animal soon carried him beyond reach of all danger. His pursuers drew off, and returned to join in the pillage of the train.

Dick spent most of the dreadful night alone on the prairie, too overcome to sleep, though he lay on the ground, with his faithful animal cropping the grass near. He relied upon him to warn him of the approach of danger, as he had done in more than one instance. There was no fear of his deserting the lad, for his intelligence was as remarkable as his affection for his young master.

It had not yet become light, and the moon was shining, when Jack, the pony, emitted a slight whinny, and came softly to where Dick was lying on his blanket on the ground. The youth was up in an instant, for he knew what that meant. Danger was near.

He climbed into the saddle, and waited until he could tell the point whence the peril threatened. Jack was looking to the right, his delicate ears thrown forward, while he breathed a little faster than usual through his silken nostrils.

Suddenly the outlines of a horseman showed in the moonlight, and Dick was about to fling himself forward on the neck of his steed and dash off, when to his astonishment a voice called to him from the gloom:

"Don't be in a hurry, pard! I'm half white, and I reckon you are."

Astonished beyond measure at being addressed in this fashion, Dick waited until the stranger approached. He then perceived that he was a large, muscular man, dressed in a mongrel costume, half savage, but mounted on a fine animal.

He leaned over his saddle and peered into the

face of the lad, as he rode alongside and halted. Evidently he was surprised at the youth of Dick.

"You look rather young to be alone in these parts," he remarked, still scrutinizing him closely; "who are you?"

Dick gave his name, and briefly told how it was he was alone in that particular spot at that hour.

"So you b'longed to that party over to the west'rd, eh? Wal, I don't want to hurt your feelings, younker, but every one of 'em has been sent under by the reds; thar isn't one of 'em left, and it was blamed lucky for you that you was off on your little hunt at the time the biz was going on."

"I feared so," replied Dick, with a quavering voice, and trying in vain to keep back the tears; "are you sure none is alive?"

"Not 'one," replied the trapper, in a voice which showed some huskiness. "It's blamed rough, but them things happen in this part of the world every now and then. I heerd the firing, and, when it was night, sneaked up nigh enough to see how things was. The varmints made a clean job of it this time. I'm sorry

for you, younker; did you have any relatives among 'em?"

Dick told his story, to which the rough looking man listened kindly. When it was through, he asked:

"What **do** you want to do?"

"I am at a **loss** to say: what do you advise me to do?"

"I don't 'spose you want to turn back home, though you might reach it in a few days with that likely **hoss** you have, and it's too fur for you to try to ride across the country alone. You might find some other party going the same way, though this ain't the season when most of the emigrants start west. S'pose you go 'long with me?"

Dick looked at him in surprise.

"They call me Black Sam, 'cause I 'spose my face ain't as lily white as yourn and some other people. I'm making a **tower** through the country on a little bus'ness of my own. The winter time is the season for hunting and trapping, and cold weather will soon be here. I'll be glad to take you along, if you can make up your mind to stand me."

With little **hesitation**, Dick Stoddard ac-

cepted the offer of Black Sam, who, despite his forbidding exterior, evidently had a kind heart. The two rode slowly away together, passing over a ridge and into a deep hollow, through which wound a small stream of water. There they dismounted, and the trapper told his young friend to sleep while he had the chance, for in that part of the world there was no saying when he would gain another opportunity.

It was near morning, but the worn-out boy, spreading his blanket on the ground, soon fell into a deep slumber, which was not broken until the forenoon was well advanced.

At the time of which we are speaking, the bison or buffaloes were so numerous on the Western plains that a child would have had no difficulty in bringing them down. Their destruction became so wanton and wholesale that, as is known, they have been virtually exterminated.

The trapper had shot one, and a nice well-browned steak awaited Dick Stoddard, who, despite the crushing affliction he had undergone, possessed a vigorous appetite. Then, as their horses were in excellent condition, they

mounted and resumed their journey toward the northwest.

They rode at a leisurely pace through a country which steadily became rougher and more hilly. A long halt was made in the afternoon, when they pushed on until the moon was shining again.

"Where will we get supper?" asked Dick, who could not see the need of riding after the day was over.

"Not far ahead. Did you notice the bufflers back yonder?"

"No," replied the surprised youth, looking around, as if he expected to see a herd of the animals.

"I haven't observed any either," remarked the trapper, "but I sorter feel in my bones that we'll sink our teeth in buffler steak afore sun-up."

"Isn't that a hill right in front of us?"

"It's a sort of ridge, and there's wood and water on tother side, which is whar we're going to camp."

"But where are the buffaloes?"

"On top of the ridge. Look sharp, and tell me if you don't see one of the critters."

"Yes—there he is in plain sight. He is a big bull."

When a point was reached where the huge creature was in full view, it was seen that he was gradually working his way over to the other side, where a number of his companions were browsing.

"If we go too close we'll scare him away," said Sam, "so I'll jump off, and slip up nigh 'nough to fetch him down, while you stay here."

From his position on his pony Dick Stoddard saw the hunter cautiously ascend one side of the ridge, just as the buffalo, which had sniffed danger in the air, hustled down the other side.

No time was to be lost, and the active and swift-footed trapper hurried up the slope, his long, graceful form being visible for a few seconds, as it took the place formerly held by the game, and was marked against the sky.

He was no more than fairly out of sight when the report of his rifle was heard, and the same instant he gave utterance to a sharp whistle, repeated three times.

The same instant, his horse, that had been standing motionless, threw up his head, with

a slight whinny, and started on a trot up the slope. Dick called to him to stop, but he gave no heed, and the lad then understood that he was obeying a signal from his master, and he hurried after him.

As the boy reached the top of the ridge he observed the hunter below, engaged in dressing the buffalo.

Sam had done quick work, sending his shot straight home to the seat of life, and, running up to the animal as he was making his last struggles, rolled him upon his face, doubling his legs under him in such a position that he was not likely to fall either way.

When Dick reached his friend he was running his knife along the spine of the buffalo. The edge of the weapon was keen, and one sweep was enough. Grasping the skin with both hands, he peeled it down each side, like bark, exposing the flesh to view. Then, with the same sharp implement, he cut two large slices, and he was through with the animal.

After extracting the portion mentioned, the rest of the bulky creature was left to decay, or to feed the maws of ravening wolves. It seemed to be a law in these days that nine

tents of the buffalo meat of the country should go to waste, tens of thousands of the animals being slain every year in the mere wantonness of sport, until now, as before stated, the bison has been virtually exterminated.

“Now, the next thing is to gather plenty of fuel, and you can help do that, Dick.”

The boy did all he could, and in a short time they had collected more than enough for their purpose.

The manner of cooking the steaks was as follows: The “hunks” that had been taken from the game were cut into thin slices, which were skewered on green sticks and held to the flame, and placed so as to miss touching the glowing coals by about the breadth of a sheet of paper.

In this way the supper of the hungry travelers was speedily prepared, and being seasoned with some pepper and salt, a goodly portion of which Black Sam always carried with him, the meat was all that an epicure could have asked

After supper came the corncob pipe, and the two made themselves comfortable by wrapping their blankets around them, even though the fire was allowed to die out gradually, it being

a principle with Black Sam never to burn a camp-fire all night, when it was possible to avoid it, while in the Indian country.

The horses were so accustomed to this sort of life that all that was necessary was to leave them to themselves. There was grass richer than the night before, and water; and animals born and reared in these regions very rarely required anything else.

The hunter had just settled himself into a pleasant position to respond to the favor Dick had asked for, a story, when both heard the report of a rifle in a northern direction, and not far away.

"I don't like that!" exclaimed Sam, quickly straightening up and looking about him.

"Why not? They didn't fire at us, did they?"

Instead of answering, the trapper began hastily pulling up roots, dirt, and stuff, and throwing them on the smouldering fire, so as to extinguish it at once.

But a few minutes passed, when, where the embers had been but a short time before, all was blank darkness, with a thick smoke slowly creeping upward, and fast dying out.

Then Sam sat down close to the boy, and said, in an undertone:

"You heerd that 'ere gun just now, didn't you?"

"Yes. What made you jump when it went off?"

"Why, it was fired by Injins, and they ain't friendly Pawnees. It won't do for them to see our camp-fire, for they would be apt to call on us."

"Don't you think they did see the fire before the gun went off?"

"No, that couldn't be, for if they knowed we'd started it they wouldn't have shot."

"But they must have heard you when you shot the buffalo."

"Of course, but they thought it was one of thar own varmints, and so didn't pay attention to it."

Dick might have asked in return by what means the hunter could know that the gun just fired was in the hands of a hostile Indian. Had he been asked, the probability is he would have found it hard to tell; nevertheless, he was as certain of the fact as he was of his own existence.

As the two sat, the ridge was on one side, while they were seated among some stunted undergrowth, just the thing in which to conceal themselves, in the semi-darkness of this unusually bright moonlight night, both being in shadow.

They were at the base of a ridge, close to a stream of water, broad and deep enough to deserve the name of creek, the shores of which were lined with the same stunted vegetation.

The report of the rifle acquainted the two intelligent horses with the nearness of danger, and they became the most vigilant sentinels on the instant.

"Now, I don't want you to speak louder than a whisper," said Sam, "and you must keep your eyes and ears open, and the very minute you see or hear anything, let me know, and I'll tell you what to do, if you're to do it."

This was a trying position in which to place such a boy as Dick Stoddard, and, of course, it was out of the question that he should have any intelligent idea of what really impended. but he was resolved to do his duty until he went to sleep, which he was equally determined should not be before the succeeding night, and

not even then, unless his companion declared it was safe to do so.

All that Sam expected was that the lad would keep awake for half an hour, perhaps, and he considered him more useful asleep than conscious on such an occasion as this.

As the two friends sat, the back of the man was toward the ridge, while Dick faced it. Both were in such deep shadow that the moonlight did not touch them, and no one could see either until within a few feet.

It will be understood that if the camp-fire had been allowed to burn, it would have made them conspicuous objects for any Indians that might be prowling in the vicinity.

Following out his custom, Sam had stationed his own horse on his right and the pony on the left, so that, if both did their duty, they would make known the approach of any hostiles from that other direction.

He would have preferred that the relative position of the animals were reversed, so that his own might have had the station nearest the point from which he believed the danger was most likely to come, but it was unwise to make the change now.

There was still the possibility that the Indians, whom Sam believed to be Sioux, were unsuspecting of the presence of whites near them, and it was not impossible that they would leave the vicinity without a collision.

The trapper believed that a party of Sioux were hunting near there, drawn by the well-known fact already referred to—that this was a favorite resort of the buffaloes, and that the group descried by him were remarkably large and fine.

These redskins, whom he had good reason for distrusting, had taken his shot for that of one of their own number.

The camp-fire was enough to betray the identity of those who kindled it, but it looked as if a strange run of good fortune had kept that also from them, the shot having been fired when the fuel was pretty well burned out.

Should it so be that the Sioux suspected the presence of enemies among the bushes at the bottom of the ridge, they had one of their favorite systems of reconnoissance and warfare at their command.

The thick undergrowth gave them a chance to steal up like so many serpents, it requiring

the sharpest kind of ears to detect them, while the creek would permit them to float downward, or work their way upward, absolutely without noise.

It was, indeed, the most inviting kind of "pasture" for all sorts of redskins.

This same place had been the scene of more than one desperate affray between Sam and the Sioux, and he held it in wholesome fear when he was trammelled by furs and peltries, or when, as on the present occasion, he had some one that was dependent upon him.

When alone, with his intelligent horse to assist him, he was confident of his ability to pull through all right, and make it costly to the redskins that attempted to disturb him.

The two sat a few minutes in silence, when he leaned over and spoke in a guarded voice to the boy:

"I ain't sartin, Dick, whether the redskins have found out we're here. If three or four hours passes without the hosses makin' any stamp, or our seein' or hearin' anything, you can make up your mind that they've gone and the way is clear. Do you b'lieve you can keep awake that long?"

"Why, of course. I can keep awake just as long as you."

"I'm glad to hear it; and you'd like to help, too. Wal, what I want you to do is to keep your peepers on the ridge, and the very minute you see a redskin let me know. Will you do it?"

"Yes. You may be sure of that."

Sam chuckled to himself, for he was certain that, long before the boy would see any Sioux stealing over the crest, he would be far gone in the land of dreams.

The task of playing sentinel at such a time is similar, in some respects, to the sport of the fisherman.

Hours may pass before there's a bite or a sign of coming danger, and yet the man anticipates it every minute, and is sustained by the excitement of expectancy, when, under other circumstances, the passage of time would be dreary and dismal to the last degree.

At the end of an hour, Sam was confident that Dick was asleep, but, to make sure, he leaned over and pronounced his name.

"Well, what do you want?" was the instant inquiry.

"What you doin'?"

"Watching that ridge, as you told me to do!"

So much time had passed since the firing of the gun without bringing anything to cause alarm, that the hunter was becoming quite hopeful, and it was in a jocose vein, therefore, that he followed up the reply of the boy with another question:

"Have you seen any of the redskins?"

"Yes, I see two now."

"Whar's that?" demanded Sam, in a husky whisper.

"Up there on the ridge."

The hunter turned his head like a flash, and the very first glance showed him that Dick Stoddard had spoken nothing but the truth.

CHAPTER II.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

BLACK SAM, the trapper, was crouching in the undergrowth, near the extinguished camp-fire, when Dick Stoddard told him there were a couple of Indian warriors skulking along on the ridge above. The man turned with lightning quickness, and saw them both.

They had no doubt come up from the other side of the slope, and were crawling on their hands and knees, when, as they reached the crest, their heads and shoulders were seen in distinct relief against the moonlit sky beyond.

This was inevitable from the nature of things, and the Sioux seemed to awaken to the fact, for they were scarcely seen when they sank down again out of sight, no doubt concluding that it was better to adopt some other line of advance.

It being impossible that they should see the site of the camp-fire, where it was in utter

darkness, a most any one would have wondered by what means the Sioux had located it.

In this instance it must have been done through the sense of smell. The grass and stuff thrown on the embers to extinguish them caused a damp, earth-like odor, which could be detected by any one near-by, without his olfactories being very highly trained.

The fact that the fire was out would tell the Sioux that, whoever the whites were, they had learned of their danger, and consequently there was certain to be the greatest caution upon both sides.

For ten minutes or so after the disappearance of the redskins from the top of the ridge, Sam and Dick never once removed their eyes from it, nor did they speak to each other. The silence was undisturbed by the slightest sound, until at the end of the time mentioned the faint stamp of a horse's hoofs was heard.

"That's my hoss," whispered the hunter. "Some of the varmints are sneakin' 'bout him, and as soon as he finds it out he lets us know it. Now, listen, Dick. They've found out whar the camp-fire is, and they'll be here purty soon. We must dig out, a little way, so

they won't know whar to place thar paws onto us. I'll crawl off here some twenty feet or so, and you must follow me on your hands and knees. Can you do it without making a noise?"

"Of course I can; you seem to think I can't do anything."

"Come ahead then, and try it."

The two crept forward with so much care that the distance was accomplished in utter silence, and it was safe for them to feel that the movement was entirely unsuspected by the nearest and most vigilant of the redskins.

That done, they settled down again to listen and watch in the darkness of the undergrowth.

The change of position brought them within less than ten feet of the creek, from which they were separated by a rank growth of vegetation.

Black Sam was expecting an approach by means of the water, he knowing that it was a favorite practice with the redskins to take advantage of such help, and he had not been in his new position long when he became certain that some of the Sioux were in the creek.

His trained ear caught the softest possible rustle—not like the cautious movement of a

paddle, nor such as would have come from a hunter wading in the creek.

It puzzled him for a minute, as it was not only peculiar, but very faint. It was as if he were trying to decipher some palimpsest, in which the writing was poor, and blurred beyond recognition.

He placed his ear to the ground, but that did not help him. Then he raised his head again, and all at once solved the mystery.

An Indian was coming up the stream in a canoe, not using a paddle, but drawing himself forward by grasping the overhanging branches and twigs. This was a very easy method of propulsion, and the vegetation being abundant, the hostile had the opportunity to continue it indefinitely.

This form of danger was so close that it would not do to whisper, and Sam touched Dick, as a warning to him against stirring or saying anything.

The stealthy progress of the redskin in the canoe continued until he had passed a short distance beyond where the two whites were crouching. Then the utter silence that succeeded showed he had come to a standstill.

He was probably looking and listening, and smelling for some clue as to where the whites were.

He didn't get it, for the latter knew too well what he was after.

After a few minutes, a rustling, gliding sound showed that the Sioux, by means of the locomotion already described, was drawing the nose of his canoe far enough among the undergrowth along the shore to hold it there, if he should leave it.

Leave it he did, as soon as it was secured, Black Sam hearing distinctly the sound of the moccasin as it touched the ground for the first time.

It was impossible for the Sioux to advance or retreat without betraying himself to the listening trapper, who was speedily convinced of the nasal keenness of the fellow when, after leaving the canoe, he headed toward the site of the camp-fire.

As Sam and Dick had shifted their position, there was little likelihood of their being discovered, by this scout, at least.

It will be understood that the latter was doing a very daring thing, even for an Indian.

It was impossible that he should know precisely where the whites were, while he must have known that it was almost equally impossible that he should not betray himself.

These considerations made Black Sam angry.

"He must take me for a fool, and when a varmint does that, I'll make him pay for it."

The trapper had drawn his pistol, he preferring that in such an encounter, although there was great risk of his betraying himself to other enemies in the vicinity.

The Sioux was not erect, nor was he upon his hands and knees, but was pushing forward in a stooping position, so that his full physical resources were at instant command in case of a collision with any of the whites.

He was groping about, listening and searching for some clew to the position of the latter, so that he might return and bring a force of his people that would be able to work understandingly.

The trapper had now got things down so fine that he was able to tell precisely the different turns of his enemy, while making this recon-

noissance, although as yet he had not caught the first glimpse of him.

The advantage, therefore, was altogether on the side of the white man.

He was so close to the surface of the ground, and so concealed, that it was practically impossible to see him, while the Indian could not approach within striking distance without betraying himself.

It looked as if the Sioux were sure to do that, for he persevered in his cautious scout, as if he were resolved to stick to it until something definite was accomplished.

This catlike manœuvring was kept up for ten minutes longer, when the sagacious horse of the trapper stamped his feet again, and his master knew that the red men were becoming dangerously numerous.

The instant the steed gave his warning, the Sioux stopped abruptly, straightened up, and assumed the attitude of attention.

It looked as if he were not precisely certain what it signified.

At the time he made this movement, he was so close to the trapper that the latter caught the outlines of his head and shoulders.

No better opportunity was needed, and the instant he was sure of his man, Sam levelled his revolver and fired.

He was as skilful with the pistol as with the rifle, and the distance was so short that it was scarcely possible that he should miss.

There was a cry, a leap, and a threshing of the bushes, and then all was still.

It was a fearful thing thus to shoot down an enemy, and Sam would not have done it had he not known that the safety of himself and the boy depended upon who should secure the first shot.

"Now we must shift again," he whispered to Dick. "More of the varmints will be poking 'round this way, and it won't do for us to stay whar we be. Foller me, and don't make no more noise than you did afore."

In this second change of position Sam moved so slowly that Dick was able to keep close to him, and guide himself by the sense of touch.

The distance was so short that only a few minutes were needed, when they came to a halt again in as deep shadow as before, each certain that he had not betrayed himself in moving from one point to another.

It may be said that the boy was becoming rapidly initiated into the perils of frontier life, and the immunity that he had enjoyed thus far served to give him a greater confidence than he would have felt had he been older.

As is always the case in this sort of business, there was much wearisome waiting between the acts of the tragedy.

Following on the shots of the trapper came complete silence.

The other Sioux must have known from the cry that one of their number had fallen, and yet the succeeding hour passed as though they were not within a thousand miles.

Instead of rushing forward to avenge their comrade, they remained quiet.

And Black Sam was well aware that these minutes of silence were busily occupied by the redskins surrounding them, who were only waiting until they could assure themselves as to how the blow could be struck.

It was their task to learn this, and it was the province of Sam to learn how they were seeking to gain that "point."

When the hour had passed, the trapper was a little surprised that it had continued so long,

and it struck him that it might be the Sioux were seeking to give the impression that they had departed, so as to throw him off the guard.

He expected that some of them would come forward to withdraw the body of their comrade, and he paid close attention to that point, confident that it could not be done without his knowledge.

At the end of the hour, Sam decided to do a little scouting for himself.

He was not desirous of spending the whole night in skirmishing back and forth in this fashion, with the prospect that the morning would bring his discomfiture.

"Dick," he said, turning his head, "will you stay right here for less nor a half-hour, while I rampage around a little?"

There was no answer to this, and the trapper repeated it, and then answered it himself.

"Yas, I guess he'll stay thar, bein' as he's sleepin' like a log."

Such was the fact.

Just when Dick was sure he was in the widest-awake condition he could be, he sank into the dreamless slumber of childhood,

breathing so softly that the vigilant ears of his friend had failed to notice it.

Sam paused a while to consider whether it was best to leave him where he lay, or whether he ought to shift the lad's position.

"If I move him somewhere else," he said to himself, "and tell him to keep awake, he won't hold out ten minutes, and I don't know whar I could stow him that he'd be safer than he is here, onless I anchor him in the creek."

So, after considering all things, he decided that he couldn't do any better than leave him where he was. He was sure of his own ability to detect the purpose and plans of the hostiles without leaving his young friend for any length of time, and the Indians having held off so long, it would seem that it was one of the most improbable things in the world that the boy should be found during the brief time he purposed to be away.

With very little apprehension of misfortune, then, the hunter crawled out from his hiding place, and in his stealthy, silent manner, moved in the direction of the ridge where the redskins had first been discovered.

He took care not to commit the blunder of these two Indians who advertised themselves by appearing on the very crest of the ridge, where they were seen with a distinctness scarcely less than that of midday.

It was his expectation that some of his enemies would take advantage of the creek, which, as we have already said, is a favorite means of advance and retreat to those of that race; but, with the single exception, they had not done so, and he now turned to the right and moved along through the deep protecting shadow of the undergrowth, expecting every minute to get the clew for which he was so anxious.

The hunter had progressed perhaps fifty feet, when he became aware that the moon was so high in the heavens that a great deal more of its light was creeping about him than was agreeable. Still, he was sanguine of keeping his movements concealed, and he went nearly as much farther, when he found out that he was in the immediate vicinity of fully half-a-dozen Sioux warriors.

They were grouped together, where it would seem they had repeated the performance of

Black Sam, who started the camp-fire and afterward extinguished it.

Here it was that the increasing moonlight proved of a special advantage to the hunter, for it had crept along through the undergrowth until a slight portion of it struck the tufted head of a redskin, who, moving his head a little to one side to reach the shadow again, did so just in time to permit the trapper to see it.

This was enough for Sam, who manœuvred with such celerity and skill, that only a few minutes were required for him to find out that there were precisely a half-dozen, who were discussing their business in such a jerky way, and in such guarded voices, that it was out of the question for him to catch a syllable of what was uttered.

Being quite an adept in the Sioux tongue, he regretted very much that he failed in this respect, for a few words would have given him all the knowledge he wanted.

Having waited as long as he dared, he drew back and began his cautious return to his young friend. Black Sam had formed his theory of the motives and course of the Indians that were so anxious for his death.

Their first warrior having failed to bring them the information they wished, they had sent back an equally skilful one in quest of the same knowledge, their action as a whole depending upon the message which he should bring.

If he should tell them precisely the number of the foe, and his position, then they were confident that the task of wiping him out would be a slight one.

Black Sam was a little apprehensive, after reaching this conclusion and starting on his return.

“That ’ere varmint may get to pokin’ ’round ’mong the bushes, and tumble over the younker, and then thar’ll be the deuce to pay, fur I’m never gwine to dig out of these parts and leave that ’ere chick behind, not much.”

It was this fear that caused him to move with celerity to his own extinguished camp-fire, listening and looking with all the skill at his command while on the way.

Despite the darkness, he was so familiar with the section that he was able to locate every point as well as if the sun instead of the moon was shining, and in this way he lost no

time in reaching the place where, about a half-hour before, he had separated from the unconscious Dick Stoddard.

The same profound stillness reigned as before, and he was hopeful that the place had not been visited during his absence.

With this hope, he crept forward, groping on his hands and knees, expecting to touch the sleeping form.

But he moved along until he had gone eight or ten feet beyond it, and all the time he found him not.

"By gracious!" he gasped, when there could no longer be any doubt, "Dick has been stole!"

He lay for a moment or two longer, debating with himself what was best to do under the circumstances, if indeed there was any possibility of his doing anything at all.

The trapper had been in so many "scrimages" and difficulties with all sorts of Indians that he had learned to think and act on the instant.

There were but two possible explanations of Dick's disappearance.

He had shifted his position himself, or some

prowling hostile had discovered and taken him away.

Sam believed that the latter theory was the true one, but as the former was possibly true, he spent several minutes in searching through the undergrowth, indulging now and then in his cautious whistle that the boy had learned to recognize.

When he had described several widening circles around the spot, without finding him, all doubts were removed as to the cause of his disappearance.

"Some varmint has run off with him, and it's the last boy that he'll ever run off with. He'll larn, like some other folks has larned, that that sort of bus'ness don't pay."

In his characteristic way he recalled that, while he himself was going to and returning from the group of Sioux warriors, he had heard nothing of the Indian concerned in this abduction, consequently he must have taken a different route.

What was his most probable course?

The creek.

Acting in this belief, he immediately made his way to the margin of the stream, and listened

Nothing was heard, and recollecting the spot where the canoe had been left, he insinuated his way to that, using his long arms and hands to the utmost.

The canoe was gone!

The matter was becoming clearer. The fragments of his theory began to fit each other.

"That ar varmint has found the chick asleep, has picked him up and toted him off to the canoe——"

He paused abruptly in his mutterings and, gliding back a short distance, examined the spot where the Indian had fallen by his revolver.

The body of the warrior was also gone!

The fragments of the theory now fitted each other perfectly.

"That varmint has put the chap that I wiped out inter the canoe, and then sat the chick in thar to make ballast, and has started down the creek with 'em."

In such a task the red scout was sure to move slowly, and Sam was hopeful of heading off the canoe before it could reach a point where its manager would leave it.

Accordingly he cut across, as it may be

termed, and with some little risk of exposing himself by his haste, he clambered down to the margin of the creek, where the overhanging undergrowth was dense as above.

Then he bent his head and listened; and, with a satisfied thrill, he caught the soft rustle made by a body insinuating itself among the leaves of a tree.

The canoe was above him, and coming down toward the very spot where he was crouching like a tiger ready to spring upon its prey.

There was no sound of paddle, nor the faintest ripple of water.

The boat was simply drifting with the current, near enough to the shore to cause some vegetation to brush softly over it and its occupants.

This was the sound the trapper heard, and that caused him to feel certain he had reached the spot in the nick of time.

During the few seconds he was waiting, he slipped his rifle over his back, securing it there very quickly, and in such a way that the stock and lock were above his head, so that they would remain dry in case of his entering the water, unless he should indulge in one of his

tremendously long dives, which he knew how to make in cases of emergency.

He did not mean to shoot the Indian unless it became necessary. They were so close to the Sioux camp that a collision would be pretty sure to bring the whole party down upon him before he could comfortably get out of the way, while if events should go on as he was quite confident they would, he saw his way clear toward accomplishing his purpose without incurring any such risk.

The current of the creek was slow, and as the canoe was retarded by the brushing of the limbs and leaves over it, its progress was anything but rapid.

But Black Sam waited with characteristic patience for the coming of the moment when he should act.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAND OF THE SIOUX.

HERE and there splinters of moonlight found their way through the branches overhead, and, as the trapper crouched down and peered intently up-stream, he strove to his utmost to catch a glimpse of his approaching enemy.

But neither the Indian nor the canoe was visible, although he knew they were within a dozen feet.

A few seconds more, and there came a slight ripple, and the rustle of the boat as the nose was forced up the bank.

It had stopped, and whoever was in it meant to land.

Black Sam moved still nearer, so as to be ready to act in the crisis which was at hand.

He was well convinced that there was but a single live Sioux in the canoe, and in leaving it he would either make separate journeys in which to carry the body of his dead comrade

and that of the sleeping boy, or he would signal to one of the warriors near at hand to come and take one while he took the other.

In case of the latter, then the trapper meant to spring forward instantly, and secure his young friend before assistance could reach the Indian.

But in case the latter chose to manage the whole affair himself, then the course of the hunter would be governed by the nature of the first load the redskin took from the boat.

All was not such utter darkness that Sam was not able to distinguish the figure of the warrior, as he stepped from the canoe and pulled it up far enough to prevent its being carried away by the current.

Then he observed him, as he bent over the frail structure, and busied himself for a moment in lifting something from within.

Was his burden the sleeping Dick Stoddard, or the eternally sleeping warrior?

A minute after, the Indian partly straightened up, and began moving off with his charge.

Thank fortune, it was all that was left of his brother-warrior!

He had taken scarcely a dozen steps, when

Sam had one hand upon the gunwale, while the other ranged hastily along the interior, searching for his young friend.

Yes, there he was, sleeping as sweetly as if lying upon his own pillow hundreds of miles away.

The hunter did not pause to wake him, or soliloquize over the way in which his calculations had succeeded, but he reaped the fullest advantage by prompt action.

The unsuspecting Sioux had not yet reached the group who were awaiting him, when Black Sam shoved the craft back in the water, stepping softly into it as it glided out from the shore.

Groping in the bottom, he found the long ashen paddle, and the small rifle that belonged to Dick.

"He stole the whole shebang," muttered the trapper; "which I'm glad of, for it saved me the trouble of goin' back thar agin to hunt it up."

Time was so valuable that he could not afford to wait for the current to carry him along, but he plied the paddle with a power which sent the canoe spinning downward in

the darkness, seemingly at great risk of being tangled in the undergrowth.

After each stroke he remained motionless a few seconds, listening for sounds of his enemies, and, hearing none, dipped the blade deep and impelled the light boat forward again.

"I reckon that that ar varmint will growl when he comes back to whar he left the canoe, and don't find it thar. He'll know that it warn't the stream that took it, 'cause it was pulled up too high for all that. He'll think that the chick was playin' possum, and woke up jest in time to slide out, and he'll be mad 'cause he didn't skulp the little feller, so he couldn't sarve him the trick; and mebbe he did skulp him."

And under the impulse of the strange thought he stopped paddling, leaned over, and carefully examined his little friend.

Thank heaven! he was safe and unharmed, unconscious of the changes of ownership he had undergone during the last hour.

The trapper kept the canoe speeding along in this swift way until he passed a considerable distance below where he had kindled his own camp-fire.

He was now without the range of operations, as it may be expressed, having passed some distance beyond the circle of the events of the night, and being fully two hundred yards from the Sioux camp-fire.

Here he landed, lifted the still sleeping Dick out of the boat, and carried the latter some fifty feet away from the stream, so as to prevent its being found, when the hostiles should come to search up and down the creek for it by moonlight.

Not content with this, he called into use his enormous strength, and easily wrenched it apart in such a fashion that when it should be found by daylight it was sure to be useless.

Black Sam, by his remarkable woodcraft, had gained elbow-room. The locality in which he had eaten his supper was so dangerous that he must get out of it as speedily as possible.

All that remained for him to do was to get his horses. Could he succeed in doing so?

He was sure of his own, but whether Dick Stoddard's pony knew enough to obey the signal was another question. He had not yet given any warning of the presence of the Indians, the stamping in both the cases referred

to having come from Screamer, as he sometimes called his horse.

The trapper uttered the signal **already** mentioned, and it was not long before he detected the approach of the sagacious animal, he advancing to meet him.

But as they encountered in the moonlight, he was not a little surprised to find it was Dick's pony.

"How's that?" he exclaimed. "I see how 'tis now."

Directly behind the pony came Screamer.

Recognizing the call of his master, he knew that both equines were needed. So he went after the other, and sent him before him.

"That's what I call *skience*!" exclaimed the pleased trapper; "thar ain't many folks besides your master that have got more brains than you."

As Dick showed no evidence of waking, the trapper took him in his arms, mounted his own steed, and started forward, the pony following obediently behind him.

Sam still headed northward, and in the course of a half-hour emerged from the undergrowth in which he had been manœuvring

with such marked success, and came out upon the open, rolling prairie again.

The route which he followed was the old one over which he had traversed so many times, in going to and returning from the beaver runs, so that with the favoring moonlight there was scarcely a probability of his going astray.

He paused several times, looked back and listened, and when he had gone a couple of miles, dismounted and applied his ear to the ground.

This failing to apprise him of anything dangerous, he concluded there was no further occasion for alarm, and he drew Screamer down to a walk and gave over all thought of disturbance from those in the rear.

"They'll bang up and down that 'ere little creek till daylight afore they'll stumble over the canoe. When they find that, they'll begin to see how the thing was done, and then, as I remarked awhile ago, thar'll be a s'prise party. Wall, Screamer, me and you have got a few miles to travel afore we reach the Yallerstun, and I'm of the opinion that it ain't the best thing in the world to tire ourselves to death at the start, so we'll go inter camp as soon as we

strike t'other grove, which ain't more nor a mile ahead."

The intelligent horse seemed to comprehend the words, for, with a faint whinny, he instantly broke into a canter, the pony trotting like a colt at his heels.

Up and down over the prairie, for a mile more, and the steed, without any direction from his master, turned in among a grove of trees, and Sam instantly leaped to the ground, and removing the trappings of both animals, turned them loose to graze for themselves, there being water and grass in abundance.

As was to be supposed, the trapper did not start a fire, but wrapped Dick up warmly, so that nothing but his nose reached the fresh air, and with their blankets covering even their feet, there was little danger of their suffering, were the temperature to descend still forty degrees lower.

It was now about freezing, and, as the grove was without a particle of undergrowth, and stood upon elevated ground, the wind had a clean sweep over and through it.

It will be readily understood that this camping site was inferior to the one vacated, so

much so, that nothing but necessity led the trapper to adopt it.

"The sleepishness of boys is somethin' extronery," muttered Sam, muffled up in his blanket. "It's like thar appetite; when it comes into 'im thar's no use of tryin' to hold up; it's bond to get thar in spite of all you can do."

Within less than five minutes of the time from which these words were uttered, the trapper was sound asleep.

The difference between his slumber and that of the boy was that a watchfulness seemed to hover about the man's, so that while it was none the less refreshing, yet it was singularly susceptible to outside disturbance. A noise that a person in the possession of his senses would scarcely notice, would rouse him as quickly as if a bombshell had burst in the air over his head.

How the Sioux at the ridge worried through the night, after the discouraging trick which the trapper played upon them, was more than he learned.

He had been mixed up in so many affairs of that kind that it gave him far less thought

after it was over than it would have caused one unaccustomed to frontier life.

But the two horses cropped their grass until they were tired, and then went to sleep, and nothing occurred during the remaining hours of night to disturb the slumber of man or beast.

Black Sam had not brought any of the buffalo meat with him, so that it was necessary to ride on farther in order to get their breakfast.

Like all such characters, the trapper was inclined at times to waggery and jokes, and he enjoyed far more than his breakfast the surprise and bewilderment of Dick Stoddard, who had gone to sleep at the base of the ridge and awaked in a grove of trees miles away.

When the lad was perfectly nonplussed, and unable to understand how it all came about, his friend told him the remarkable experience that had befallen him during his sleeping hours, and then, as may be supposed, his amazement was greater than ever.

The reflection that he had been in the actual possession of a wild Sioux Indian could not but make him shudder, and cause him to re-

solve that the next time he undertook to keep awake he would do so.

"Sam, why can't we sleep all day and travel all night?" he asked, after revolving the perplexing subject in his mind.

"'Cause that wouldn't be a bit better than to do as nature intended. Couldn't the varmints foller us just as well, and a blamed sight better, by daylight than by night? All we've got to do is to look out for them."

"Well, I s'pose so; but it's awful hard work for me to keep awake when I'm sleepy."

"So it is for a man. But you'll get it after a while. Now we must hunt for breakfast. Come on!"

The next minute they were in the saddle and galloping to the northward over rolling prairie, interspersed at intervals with timber, ridges, and hills, while game appeared everywhere in abundance.

"What are we going to have for breakfast, Sam? Will it be buffalo or fish?"

"Neither," was the reply; "it's a good thing to change your diet now and then."

"What is it going to be?" pursued the boy.

The trapper turned his head and smiled

kindly, uttering nothing, but saying, by his manner, that the questioner had nothing to do but to contain himself in patience for a while and he would be satisfied.

If the brisk morning ride were intended as an appetizer, it accomplished its work most effectually.

There was scarcely need of it, for both were sure to be ready for their meals before the latter were ready for them.

Dick had not ridden far before he felt he was never so hungry in all his life, but he refrained from saying anything, through fear that the hunter would not think him manly.

Sam had no wish to try him too much, but he was searching for a particular kind of game, which, not being as abundant as buffalo, compelled a longer hunt.

He was looking sharp, however, and was confident of speedy success.

Finally, when Dick began to feel impatient at the continued delay, they drew their horses in at the base of quite a hill, and the trapper said:

"We'll climb off here, and be careful 'bout gettin' to the top of the hill, for I think the

game is over thar, and if he is, he's mighty skeery. S'pose you wait till everything is ready?"

There could be no objection to this, and Dick Stoddard contented himself with standing by Jack and watching the motions of the hunter, as he cautiously made his way to the top of the hill.

Just before attaining this point, he sank down upon his face, so that when he did peer over only his head and shoulders could be seen from the other side.

Several minutes, that seemed very long to the boy, were spent by the trapper in this scrutiny, then he turned to Dick and motioned for him to join him, signifying also that it should be done in the same careful manner he had used.

Dick Stoddard lost no time in obeying, for he was hungry, and also curious to know what it meant.

"Be careful and don't get your head above," said the hunter, "for we're in an unlucky place."

From the manner and words of Sam, the boy expected to see a whole war-party of In-

dians within a short distance, and creeping to the crest, he gazed over with a good deal of fear; but his astonishment was unbounded when, instead of redskins, he saw only three timid-looking animals grazing near upon a portion of the prairie where the grass was longer than he had noticed heretofore.

"What are you scared at?" asked Dick, when he had stared around for several minutes without discovering anything that could justify in his eyes the alarm of the hunter.

"Them critters thar."

"What are they?"

"Antelopes."

"Will they hurt us?"

"Hurt us? Not much, I reckon, but we want to hurt 'em."

"Is it an antelope breakfast that you mean to get?"

"That's it, if we can."

"Why don't you do it, then? What's to hinder you shooting them?"

"They're too far off, and how kin they be reached?"

"Sneak through the grass toward them, can't you? They're so far off that they won't

notice you going down the hill, an' then the grass is so tall that you can creep through it without their seeing you."

"You couldn't do it, from this way. Afore you could climb over the ridge they'd be off, whether they seed you or not."

Having aroused the curiosity of the boy, Black Sam then explained that the antelopes before them were probably the most timid and inquisitive animals found in the West, but that their sense of smell is wonderfully acute, enabling them, when the wind is favorable, to detect the approach of a foe before he is fairly in sight.

It so happened, in the present instance, that the wind was blowing directly from the hill toward the flat upon which the animals were grazing, and Sam knew that if he should place himself upon the highest point, these extraordinary creatures would take the alarm on the instant.

Hence the great care he displayed in reaching his post of observation, and in holding it afterward.

"Now, if you'll stay here," he said, "and promise me that you won't let anything more

than your head get above the hill, I'll try and bring down one of them critters for breakfast, and they carry the kind of meat that's good, too."

Dick, of course, promised, and, as the morning was getting well along, the trapper set off without any more delay.

As he was now directly to the windward of the antelopes, his first proceeding was to change their relative position.

This was done by moving around to the right, the swell of the prairie affording him all the protection, until he had passed some forty degrees, when it sloped off like the rest of the plain, and was no longer available.

By this time, however, Sam had reached a point where he believed he could afford to take the risk, and Dick saw him begin moving toward the antelopes in the same stealthy fashion that he used in entering a camp of hostile Indians.

He was bent forward in a stooping position, so that his knees almost touched his chin as he walked, while he held his long rifle in his hand, ready to be used at an instant's notice.

The antelopes continued grazing, as though

unsuspicious of danger, and the hunter advanced until he had reached a point within a couple of hundred yards, perhaps, by which time he was among a denser growth of grass.

Here he paused, lay flat upon the ground, and the next thing that excited the amazement of Dick Stoddard was the sight of the trapper, while lying prone in this way, waving his cap from the end of his ramrod.

He swayed it slowly back and forth, just as if it were intended as a signal to some one, as, indeed, it may be said it was, and it almost instantly attracted the notice of the three antelopes.

Almost at the same moment all threw up their heads, stared for a second at the curious object, and then turned and ran in the opposite direction, with the speed, it may be said, of the wind.

"There goes our breakfast," exclaimed the disappointed Dick. "I would a great deal rather that he would shoot some of the buffaloes we have seen than wait this way. Helloa! what's the matter now?"

The antelopes, which had started at such high speed, ran but a little way, when they

came to an abrupt halt, turned about, and stood staring at the cap and ramrod, that had steadily continued their swaying back and forth from the first.

They were actuated by that remarkable curiosity for which they are noted.

The trapper did not attempt to approach them, but contented himself simply with signalling in the manner described.

The antelopes remained standing but a minute or two when they turned and trotted off, going a much shorter distance than before. This time, instead of standing stationary, they walked timidly toward the object which so tantalized their curiosity.

They did so very slowly, step by step, frequently halting, as if their minds were not clear as to the wisdom of their course.

The interest finally centred in the largest of the three, his whole series of actions being more "advanced" than the others.

He ran faster, halted sooner, and was the first to take the alarm, and the first to recover and try it again.

Finally the group halted, something over a hundred yards distant, and while two stood

motionless, the third began again his timid advance toward the curious-looking signal.

Back and forth it oscillated, like a pendulum, and with scarcely less regularity, for had its speed increased or diminished, the alarm of the antelopes would have overcome their curiosity and they would have sped away beyond recall.

When the larger fellow had picked his way for a short distance, the others made no attempt to follow, seeming to be content to allow him to solve the mystery.

This pioneer made himself interesting from the extreme caution he used.

He raised his feet very high, sometimes holding one uplifted for several seconds, as though he were a dog that had pointed some game.

Then again, with all four of his feet planted firmly on the ground, and his head thrown high, he stared at the thing with such rigidity that he resembled many of the stuffed specimens of himself seen in our museums.

At times his prudence seemed to get the mastery, and wheeling around, he trotted almost back to where his companions stood,

when the sight of them seemed to make him ashamed of his timidity, and veering about again he went still farther than before in the direction of the swaying cap.

Nearer and nearer, while the trapper, stretched out upon his face, carefully noted the lessening distances, contented to wait, for well he knew the fish, sooner or later, must come to his net.

Dick Stoddard comprehended now the little drama that was going on before his eyes, and he could not but feel the greatest interest in the result, knowing not the certainty of Sam as to what the issue would be, as he knew nothing of the antelope and its habits.

"There it goes again!" he exclaimed, his hopes down to zero as the animal made another backward bound, and trotted off toward his companions. "Sam ought to have let me go 'round on t'other side of them, so one of us would be sure of shooting something."

But again the creature halted (Dick could not guess the number of times), and in his timid, hesitating manner, approached still nearer the dangerous point.

"I don't see why he don't fire," said the impatient boy; "bime-by that antelope will see what he is, and then he'll be off like a shot——"

Down dropped the liberty-cap, up came the rifle; there was a flash of fire from the grass, and the dull report had scarcely reached the ears of Dick Stoddard when the animal bounded in mid-air, ran a few yards, and fell dead.

CHAPTER IV.

A WONDERFUL REGION.

DICK STODDARD, stretched out on top of the prairie swell, could scarcely restrain a cheer when he saw the antelope fall to the earth, pierced to the heart by the bullet of Black Sam.

The trapper had manœuvred with the signal long enough for the boy to understand and enter fully into the scene, and the result was almost as much a triumph for one as the other.

The lad was on the point of jumping up and flinging his hat in air, when he was thrown into a fever of excitement by observing that the two antelopes, in their excess of terror, were coming at full speed directly toward him.

"Maybe I'll get a shot," was the thought that came to him, as he raised the hammer of his rifle and held himself in readiness to take advantage of his promised good fortune.

"**I wonder** if they'll hurt a feller?" was his

next and more troublous thought. "I wish there wasn't two of 'em, for I can't shoot more than one, and if the other goes for me I don't know what I'll go for. There ain't any use of jumping on either of the horses, for the antelope is quicker than they, and the one I didn't kill would be sure to jump on right after me."

But the boy was resolved to stand, or rather lie, where he was, and do his best, hoping that if he got in any serious difficulty the trapper would reach him in time to save him.

The antelopes, generally so cautious about running into danger, seemed to have lost their heads, and came bounding forward with wonderful speed, straight up the hill upon which the boy lay, with his gun pointed over the crest at them.

They were side by side, scarcely ten feet apart, and one of them looked as if he meant to step upon the waiting lad, who made sure that he kept him covered with his weapon.

Afraid to fire, while even at a moderate distance, through fear of missing, Dick held his charge until the panic-stricken brute was within twenty feet of where he lay, when, as

the muzzle was pointed directly at its chest, he pulled trigger.

The distance was too short to miss, and the bullet ploughed its way through the heart, and almost the entire length, of the antelope, whose species scarcely ever die as instantly as do many others.

Instead of dropping in its tracks, it made a couple of bounds more furious than any, the last carrying it high in air, and completely over the head of Dick, who, looking wonderingly upward, saw the animal, as it seemed to him a dozen yards above him, its legs gathered under it, as it went flying forward like some curious bird.

Following its incredible parabola, the boy observed the animal curve over him, and striking the ground some distance below, struggle to its feet again, make another weak bound, and then fall in the struggles of death, killed by his bullet.

The third and only surviving antelope made a sharp turn when on the very top of the hill, and sped off with a velocity that speedily carried him beyond all danger from man or boy.

"Now, I guess I can afford to hurrah!" he

shouted, throwing up his hat. "There ain't many boys that can shoot an antelope, and kill him at the first fire."

Black Sam, as soon as he had brought down his animal, ran forward with his knife for the purpose of securing that which they needed for breakfast.

As he had done all he expected or wanted to do, he paid no further attention to the others, until he heard the sound of the rifle from the hill which he had left. He looked up with some fear, thinking that the shot had come from an Indian.

"Wall, by gracious!" he exclaimed. "If Dick hain't banged away at one of them critters, and, as I don't see but one of 'em gallopin' down hill, I shouldn't wonder if he'd dropped his."

Hastily carving out the piece he needed, he took it in hand and ran in the direction of the hill to learn the success of his young friend.

Most of his doubts were removed by seeing the fellow flinging his hat in air, and leaping and shouting.

"He wouldn't be doin' that if he had made

a miss of it," was the conclusion of the trapper, who, a few minutes after, as he came around by the hill, saw the trophy lying on the ground at the feet of the conqueror.

Sam could not but sympathize with the delight of the boy over his exploit, and he shook him by the hand, and congratulated him, as the lad really deserved.

"The next thing will be a buffler, and arter that, what?"

"A grizzly bear!"

Sam laughed at the vaulting ambition of the lad in the way of hunting.

"You mustn't want to grow too fast," said he, patting him on the head; "a boy can't turn a somersault and drop down a big hunter. He's got to grow up to it; but we'll talk 'bout that some other time. Just now, you and me are hungry, and we want breakfast. Off yonder, we'll find enough of wood to start a camp-fire, and let's make things dance."

"But ain't you going to eat any of *my* game?" asked the boy.

"Sartinly, sartinly; I mean to cook this hunk to take 'long with us, so we needn't stop every time we want a bite. Then we'll cook

'nough of yours to give us all we want to eat this mornin'."

This arrangement was followed out to the letter.

It required but a few minutes to start the fire, and by the time it was fairly under way, the tender, juicy antelope steaks were crisping and broiling in the blaze.

Seasoned to suit the palate, they were taken while scorching-hot, and as the jaws masticated the luscious food, no better way of satisfying one's hunger can be imagined.

Amateur hunters will understand that there was a peculiar relish about the meal to young Dick Stoddard, who called the attention of the trapper over a score of times to the fact that it was he who had furnished the steaks to both.

The boy was no more pleased than was Sam, who complimented him again, and assured him that he had really done something which he could boast of, when he went back home.

Sam took pains to praise not so much the shot itself as the coolness displayed. The distance was so short that the aim was nothing wonderful, but nine boys out of ten would have

fired too soon, thereby not only missing the game, but scaring it off beyond recovery.

Our readers may be sure that Dick made no mention of the fright that came over him when he first saw the antelope bearing down, or rather up, toward him. He thought it hardly worth while to do that.

As the flesh was of the finest quality, Black Sam spent an hour in cooking slices, which were carefully folded in a lot of green leaves, and then laid away in a sack that he always carried for that purpose. Thus provided, he was now able to ride forward three or four days without starting a fire with which to prepare his meals.

From this point, the direction pursued for several days was more to the west than heretofore. Although following a route familiar to the trapper, yet Dick Stoddard could not see anything resembling a trail, and it seemed to him as if they were entering a wilderness as unknown to his companion as to himself.

There was a noticeable change in the temperature over that of the first days, it remaining almost at the freezing point. Sam was quite concerned lest it should prove too severe for the

boy, whose cheeks became as red as apples, and whose naked hands grew numb at times in holding the reins. He showed him how he might put his hands in his pockets, and let the lines lie loose, while the thick blanket was turned into a shawl, so skilfully secured that he was as comfortable as could be wished.

The surface also underwent a marked change.

Instead of being of the rolling prairie order, it lost that distinctive character as they approached the Black Hills, and was cut up with greater elevations and depressions than any they had met. There was more timber, and it became apparent that, so long as this sort of travelling continued, their progress must be considerably slower than heretofore.

Black Sam turned somewhat off his regular course, for the purpose of riding to the top of an elevation which offered a chance for an extended view of the country they were entering.

It was a laborious task for the horses to reach the top, and when it was attained they were given a full hour's rest, spent mostly by the two surveying the expanse of mountain, prairie, stream, and woodland spread out before them.

The trapper was unable to detect anything that could cause concern. Some two miles to the westward, on an elevation less than their own, the smoke of a camp-fire was seen, but at that distance nothing could be discerned of those grouped around it.

In this section there could be no doubt that all such signs indicated the presence of hostile Indians, but the trapper feared no disturbance from them, as they were off the line of his route, and could know nothing of his whereabouts.

His own winding path, which he discerned opening out for miles before him, so far as his experienced vision was capable of judging, was clear of all obstructions.

When the horses were sufficiently rested, they were led down the steep declivity, and the two mounted and were off again.

The progress during the day was varied enough to keep Dick Stoddard's interest to the highest point. When the afternoon was about half gone, a swift mountain-stream was reached, where it looked as if all travelling in that direction must end.

It was a hundred feet wide, very deep, and

so rapid, that it seemed that the strongest swimmer must be helpless when once caught within it.

The two reined up and allowed their animals to drink from it, while the boy contemplated it with dismay.

"I declare, Sam," said he, "I don't see how we can go across there. We can't swim it, can we?"

He shook his head.

"Man nor hoss couldn't make any headway agin that, and thar ain't many bridges in this part of the world."

"I s'pose there must be some place where the horses can walk over?"

"Thar ain't no such place that I could ever find, and yet I've crossed this ere river, as you may call it, fifty times."

"On a raft it must have been."

"Nothin' of the kind—never floated over in my life. Now how do you s'pose I done it?"

"I give it up; I can't think of any way at all, Sam."

"Well, ride 'long with me, and I'll show you."

"Oh! I know," called out the lad, in no little

excitement; "there's some narrow place where Screamer jumped over."

The trapper laughed at the ingenuity of the lad.

"A purty good idea, Dick, purty good; but you're wrong agin. This ar stream is forty yards wide at the narrowest part. My hoss and I have crossed without jumpin' over—that you can know for yourself—swimmin' or ridin' in a boat or on a raft, or on a bridge, or goin' round it, and a boy that can shoot an antelope for breakfast orter be able to guess the riddle."

"I hope you ain't joking, Sam."

"I'm tellin' you the solemn truth, Dick, and I'll prove it to you. Inside of twenty minutes you'll be on t'other side the stream too."

"Will you be with me?"

"Sartinly; me and Screamer are goin' to show you how the thing is done."

"Well, I couldn't guess if I took a month."

Black Sam was not a little pleased to find that he had his young friend so puzzled, and he let his horse walk at his own gait, apparently in no hurry to enlighten him.

When they had ridden a short distance a

roaring sound was heard, which rapidly increased as they advanced.

The trapper explained that this noise was caused by the stream rushing through some falls or rapids a short distance above, and a few minutes later they came in sight of them.

The current was twice as wide as where they first saw it, and was forced to fight its way down a steep declivity, and around a hundred rocks of varying size.

Some of these projected above the water, while others came within a few inches of the surface.

But they were all obstructions which served to dash the waters into foam and numerous whirlpools, that must have been capable of destroying any kind of craft that attempted to shoot them.

"Are you going to try to get over here?" asked Dick, frightened at the prospect.

"I rather guess not. But we're purty near the spot."

Turning his horse to the right, with the boy following him, they were soon out of sight of the falls, and although they changed to the

left again, they failed to catch sight of the stream.

Dick noticed that they were descending into a sort of ravine, the rocks being abundant, and the vegetation of the most scraggy and mountainous character.

It was not long before, at the bottom of the ravine, he found they were passing under an arch, bearing resemblance to the remarkable curiosity known as the Natural Bridge of Virginia.

A small stream ran beneath, but it scarcely more than wetted the hoofs of their horses' feet.

The boy made his neck ache from gazing upward at the jagged, rocky spar far above their heads, which recalled, at the first glance, the structure referred to.

"Have you ever heard of the Natural Bridge of Virginia, Sam?" he asked.

"Yes, I b'lieve I've heard folks speak of it down in Omaha and St. Louey."

"Well, I've never seen it, but I've read about it, and I think this is a more wonderful thing than that. Why don't travellers tell 'bout this, and have pictures of it in the school-books, like the Natural Bridge?"

“ ‘Cause the travellers haven’t sot eyes onto it yet. When they do, I s’pose they’ll go back and let everybody in the world hear tell of it. There is a good many things out in this part of the world that they don’t know nothin’ about on t’other side the Mississippi. Thar’s greater curiosities among the Black Hills and Rocky Mountains than you ever dreamed ’bout, and which are only knowed just now to the wild Injuns, and a few hunters and trappers like myself. Thar’s falls ten times as high as Niagara, and cañons so deep you can’t see the bottom, and trees so tall that a feller gets tired out afore he can walk around—and he has to look twice afore he can see over the top—rocks so big that, if they should fall over, they’d break a hole through the earth, while the mountains are so high that the moon has to turn out for ’em when she sails through the stars, and as for the perairies——”

“There!” interrupted Dick. “That will do, Sam. You’re telling me a little too big stories. When are we going to cross that river?”

“We’re fifty yards more than across this very minute,” was the astonishing answer.

“I don’t see how that is,” said the boy, be-

moving this to be another specimen of the hunter's waggery.

For the last five minutes the two horsemen had been steadily rising, and as proof of the truth of what Sam had just stated, he pointed backward and a little to the left.

Following this direction, Dick saw behind them the dashing falls that had attracted his wonder a short time before, the roaring sound at the same moment striking upon his ears with redoubled force.

He understood how it all came about without any further explanation.

They had passed beneath the river, by a tunnel which nature herself had furnished.

It was a wonderful formation indeed, but they were in a land of wonders, liable at any time to come upon more remarkable curiosities than that which they had just seen.

They had scarcely got beyond sound of the falls, when the boy was struck with the character of the path which they were following, so different from anything they had experienced before.

They were traversing what might be called a dry cañon, through which, at some remote

day, a river forced its way with such prodigious power that the rocky sides, in many places, had been worn, by the friction of the heavy stones it carried, as smooth as marble.

The rocks towered on both sides to heights varying from fifty to five hundred feet, the rays of the sun being so shut out that in many places an eternal twilight held reign.

The air was cold, and now and then they encountered a draught, blowing with so much power in their faces that Dick feared he would be carried off Jack, who frequently stopped as if to gather strength to force his way against it.

Then again all was as still as the tomb, and the sound of their horses' hoofs upon the flinty earth echoed along the sides of the cañon in a way that caused the boy frequently to turn his head, under the impression that strangers were approaching. The width of this natural path was of the same varying character as the height, the sides now and then sloping upward and away, but they were generally perpendicular, and even more than that.

There were two occasions during this afternoon's ride when the towering rocks were so nearly joined that it became absolutely dark

below, and a shuddering fear crept over Dick, making him anxious to hurry forward where the air did not seem so heavy, and it was possible to obtain more sunlight.

"What a good place this would be for a river!" said he, in an awed voice, as he came out of one of these dark, tunnel-like passages. "I wonder if there has ever been one here!"

"Yes, sir," was the emphatic response; "thar's been a young Mississippi squeezed into here, and the way it has buzzed through has made things hum."

"I s'pose it's been a good many years ago."

"So it has, when it run reg'lar, but thar air two or three times every year when it's chock full of water, trees, and rocks, that go tearin' down like a drove of bufflers with the perairie on fire, and scorchin' thar tails behind 'em."

"Hark! I hear the water coming now!" exclaimed Dick, turning his white face, so as to look behind him.

But Black Sam laughed at his fears.

"That was the falls; a twist of the wind happened to bring the sound down on to us just then. This ain't the time of year that the water fills in this cañon."

"When is it?"

"In the spring, after the snows have begun to melt in the mountains and up among the head-waters of the rivers, and thar's so much water that it don't know what to do with itself, and s it goes sloshin' and sloppin' over everything, and grabbin' hold of any chance it can git to find its way down to whar the stream is broad enough to take all that can come."

"Did you ever see it when it was that way?"

"I should think I had," grunted the trapper.

"I was fool enough to get cotched inter it once."

And noting the inquiring look of the boy, the hunter found himself bound to explain.

"It war all of fifteen years ago, when Hank McCabe and me had finished up our winter's trappin' and had started humward. We had the poorest luck that season I ever knowed afore or since, and Hank war so completely disgustified that he told me he meant to hire out as a boatman on the Ohio, and never go West again, and I shudder to think that he nearly persuaded me to do the same thing, so near do we sometimes come to make a mistake that we can never get over.

"We hadn't fifty skins atween us, so we strapped them onto our ridin' horses, and left the pack animals up among the mountains where they could laugh, grow fat, and kick up their heels till we came back six months after, onless the Injuns should pick 'em up in the meanwhile.

"The weather wasn't cold at all. I never seed it so mild in March as it was when we started, which, you know, was earlier than usual. The snow was meltin', and every stream we came to was so blamed high that we war bothered half to death to git over. It was so hard that a good many times we had to slide off, and hang on by the horses' tails, so as not to pull 'em down too much; and more than that, it often got so bad that if we hadn't helped jerk 'em out, they'd drowned."

"You didn't have Screamer then, did you?"

"No; that was afore he was born. You might put him inter such a hole, and he'd find some way of gettin' out. Wall, you can understand from what I've told you that water was a blamed sight plentier than war needed, though natur' couldn't have thought we had 'nough, 'cause for three days and nights the

rain poured down without stoppin', and it was as cold as ice, too.

"Wall, I've seen pleasanter weather, I reckon, than that, and you orter heard McCabe growl. He got mad 'nough two or three times to cave in my head for persuadin' him that the trappin' business war delightful.

"But the rain hadn't more 'n fairly begun to sizzle down, when we happened to strike a sort of cave, whar it was as dry as the inside of a powder-horn, and lettin' our animiles run loose we turned in thar, with eight or ten pounds of pemmican that we'd took 'long with us from Fort Leavenworth, and we vowed we war goin' to stay thar till the storm held up, even if it war six months, and we had to stay a year and starve to death to do it.

"I'm sure we'd carried out our vow ef it hadn't been that we war routed out the very fust night in a way that we despised and didn't count on.

"That 'ere cave war in this same cañon, and down at the bottom, too, and we war a couple of fools that we didn't know better than to crawl inter such a hole.

"It was the fust night, and we were smok-

in' our pipes, takin' things sorter easy and sassy-like, when Hank remarked to me that the rain made a blasted noise, and I didn't feel like dispootin' it, when I had to yell my head nearly off to make him hear me. The racket was so great that we had to screech like mad when we spoke, and it warn't refreshin' to take our bath straight and stedly like a reg'lar diet.

"But bime-by we made an observation simultaneous-like to the effect that the best thing we could do just then was to get up and git. The waters war comin' from somewhar down thar in the cañon, in a way that was discouragin' to reflect on, and it come pourin' inter the cave in such a hurry that we come mighty nigh breakin' our necks in our ambition to get out afore we war drowned.

"Hank came out head fust, and I turned a sommerset over him, an away we went down the cañon, clawin' at the rocks, grabbin' at the trees, and spittin' out a hogshhead or two of water every few minutes. What had come of our hosses we didn't know, 'cause it took all our time to try and figure out what war to become of us. Ef we'd been out in the middle of a big river, it would have been easy jist to

paddle along till we got a chance to dig out, but you understand that that couldn't be done, cause in the fust place the rocks round us war so high that thar was no show, and then it was dark as a pile of black cats, and then again the stream run so hard that it carried everything, even to big rocks, and we war expectin' every minute to get mashed as flat as a flapjack.

"Wall, how we got out of that 'ere scrape war more nor I could ever understand. I was dead sure that Hank was drowned, and he was deader sure that I war wiped out. We couldn't see each other when it was so dark, and thar was such a racket that it wasn't no use to yell at each other.

"It war 'bout an hour when I bumped up agin a rock, and found out that I could hold on and drag myself out. That's what I done, and laid still till morning, when I found that Hank was a-layin' not more nor twenty feet away, bunged and banged up as bad as I was.

"Both our hosses war never heard of agin, and we tramped two days afore we could pick up any others. That ended Hank McCabe's trappin' perfession, 'cause nothin' could **never** persuade him to try it agin."

CHAPTER V.

A MEMORABLE NIGHT.

As the afternoon wore away, Black Sam and Dick Stoddard were still riding through the cañon, and the lad could not see any signs of reaching the end.

If anything, the towering, rocky wall rose to a greater height as they advanced, and had there come a rush of waters, or had Indians appeared in front and rear, the two horsemen would have been entangled beyond all possibility of escape.

But, as the trapper had shown, the former danger was not to be thought of, and he gave scarcely any more heed to the latter, which is present always with any traveller of the Northwest.

Answering the almost ceaseless questions of the boy, he assured him that their encampment that night would be made in the cañon, from

which they were not likely to emerge until noon of the following day.

He had the halting-place in mind from the first, and it was still a number of miles ahead, but could be easily reached before dark.

The way was so rough and uneven that they scarcely ever ventured off a walk.

Dick, as was to be expected in one of his years, used his eyes to the utmost, staring upward at the magnificent rocks towering in such mighty masses over his head, until his aching neck compelled him to desist.

The remarkably fine weather of the last week and more which had been occupied in their journey seemed about to end.

The air, besides being cold, was filled with a penetrating dampness of the most unpleasant nature, and the sky was overcast in a way that betokened a coming storm.

Beside this, the rumble of thunder more than once reached their ears, and the gloom of the cañon was crossed and lit up by streakings of lightning.

But none of these was of a particularly threatening character, and Sam, who was well read in weather signs, gave it as his opinion

that if rain fell during the night it would not be very copious, and it was impossible that it should cause any rush of water in the cañon like what he had told his friend about.

These floods are the result of the enormous melting of snow and ice in the spring of the year, or of some long-continued descent of rain, such as is seen only once in a number of years.

The little stream which crawled through the centre of the cañon, twisting by stones, and frequently disappearing beneath rocks, was of clear, cold water, and was grateful to both riders and animals, as they frequently found during the afternoon.

Here and there were deposits of dirt upon which the grass grew rankly, while tufts of it, together with stunted trees, projected from the rocks at varying distances above their heads, so that while the vegetation was nothing like what they had seen elsewhere, yet it was sufficient to satisfy their animals on a pinch.

At last, when the shadows of night were gathering about them, the trapper drew the rein of his horse, and, jumping to the ground, turned round toward his young friend.

“Well, Dick, here we are, and here I reckon we’ll stay till the sun comes up again. How do you like it?”

“It looks well enough,” replied the lad, gazing about him and taking in all the points possible.

They had halted in one of the broadest portions of the ravine, the walls being several hundred feet apart, and of great height. On the right was a projecting ledge of rock, a dozen feet over their heads, whose dimensions were such that it acted like an immense umbrella, capable of protecting fifty men with their animals against the fury of any storm.

Charred and half-burned embers scattered around showed that the remarkable advantages of this spot as a camping-site had struck more than one party in passing through; and, as the remains of trees, limbs, and drift-woods—relics of former floods—were scattered everywhere, it was the work of but a few minutes for the two to gather all the fuel needed for the night.

Sam called the attention of Dick to several other excellencies of this spot which he was not likely to notice. In the first place, the

ravine made a sharp curve both beyond and in the rear of the place, so that the camping-site was invisible either way from any distance.

Beneath the projecting rock the wall was so hollowed out that the camp-fire could be made secure against any cold wind that might drive up and down the ravine. Of course, no enemy on the rocks overhead could reach them, so long as they were gathered under the immense wing mentioned.

One of the horses was sent to the turn above, and the other to the one below, where it was their duty to act as sentinels through the night, there being plenty of grass in both cases to afford them their fill of food.

The trapper had followed up the practice, adopted with the antelope, of carrying enough cooked meat with him to last several days.

This was convenient, and enabled them to make much better progress than would have been possible otherwise, and they were also insured of something like regularity in their meals, which was no inconsiderable thing, when it is remembered that they were favored with prodigious appetites.

Thus it was that Sam had enough meat to

furnish their supper and breakfast, after which it would become necessary to lay in another supply; and, as they calculated upon reaching the open country before dinner-time, they were sure to find abundant opportunities.

As the fire flamed up, they sat down within the radius of its comfortable warmth, and ate the choice steaks, that were tender, and none the less enjoyable because they had been cooked a couple of days.

Supper finished, the trapper produced his pipe as was his custom, and while he puffed away, regaled his young friend with accounts of his former experience and adventures, while the youth listened with rapt attention, until, as was the rule, his eyes became heavy and drooping, and he sank into slumber.

When the trapper saw that he was unconscious, he walked to where his head had drooped, stretched him out in an easy position upon the blanket, which was also carefully folded over him so as to protect him against cold.

The fond mother herself would not have wrapped up the loved child with more thoughtful affection than did the hardy trapper, who

looked at him repeatedly to make sure he needed no more attention.

This done, Black Sam sat an hour or so longer smoking his pipe, listening to the muttering thunder, watching the quivering, flaming lightning, which was not violent, and then he sat gazing into the embers of the smouldering camp-fire.

What strange fancies were running through his head it would be hard to conjecture; but there is no man without a past, and there must have been something saddening in the memories that crowded upon him, for he sighed, and finally throwing his pipe aside, walked out into the open air, and stood a long time looking out in the gloom, as though the lightning and thunder were fit companions to his thoughts.

But these spells never continued long, and he seemed to throw them off after he had sat awhile.

He, too, gathered his blanket about him, and "lay down to pleasant dreams."

"As near as I can judge," he muttered to himself, "thar ain't no 'arthly danger, and, as I hain't had much sleep, I'm going to put in a squar' night of it this time."

And he did.

He needed the rest, and when at last he shut his eyes in slumber, they continued closed through the hours which were illumined by the lightning and made terrible by the thunder. As there was nothing in these that was dangerous, it would seem as if the trapper chose not to awaken.

With Dick Stoddard the case was far different, and his experience on that memorable night was one which he could not forget if he lived a thousand years.

He slept for something like three hours, when a rattling peal of thunder awoke him, and he started up and looked around.

At this moment there was a flash of lightning which showed him the unconscious form of the trapper on the other side the camp-fire, which had smouldered so low as to afford scarcely any light.

"He must need his sleep," said Dick to himself, "and so I won't wake him, though I hate to be alone at such a time as this."

His blanket had become somewhat disarranged from his involuntary movements during sleep, and he gathered its thick comfortable

folds about him with the purpose of sinking into slumber again.

About this time he noticed a rapid diminution in the thunder and lightning, until it may be said it had very nearly ceased altogether.

Another half-hour passed on, and still from some unusual cause Dick lay awake, staring in a vacant, absent way at the fire, which had diminished to a half-dozen embers, that threw out a dull, red glare for a short distance around.

He was lying thus staring, and wondering why it was that he did not go to sleep, now that only the most distant muttering of thunder was heard, when he saw something glisten near the fire, which he was sure was not there a few minutes before.

It was only a tiny speck, but it scintillated with an intense light, such as a pure diamond shows when turned in the rays of the sun.

The attention of the boy was awakened and riveted on the instant, and while he was vainly striving to guess what it meant, he became aware that it was moving over the ground, its position slowly shifting, and approaching the spot where he lay.

"That's queer," he said to himself. "I've never seen anything like that. What can it mean?"

At that instant one of the embers fell apart, and a little spiral flame shot up, illuminating the immediate darkness with a transient but glowing light.

By this brief aid the boy solved the mystery that was perplexing him.

There was, at that moment, an immense rattlesnake gliding by the smouldering camp-fire toward the spot where he lay. Its long, thick, tapering form seemed covered with scales, which glinted and flashed in the firelight with hideous beauty.

As the ember fell apart, the reptile slightly rattled its tail, as if to warn all enemies that it was ready for them.

The knowledge that such an immense reptile was not only near him, but approaching closer every second, paralyzed Dick Stoddard, so that he was in the condition of one held in the grasp of some nightmare, wherein he sees the approach of the most revolting of monsters without the ability to move hand or foot in the way of escape.

He could not stir, nor had he the power to cry out. Certain that the reptile was coming for him, he had no doubt that it was able to strike through a double thickness of the blanket enfolding him.

Sam had told him several stories of these rattlesnakes, many of which grow to an enormous size in the Northwest, and they had killed one a short time before, so that, aside from the unmistakable warning the serpent itself had given, he recognized it the instant the fire-light fell upon it.

It is not usual to see the *crotalus* abroad so late in the season, but it may be that the warmth of the camp-fire penetrated its hiding-place and drew it forth. At any rate, it was there, and it is difficult to imagine a situation more frightful than that of both the man and boy, the former unconscious of his peril.

At the same moment that the snake rattled, at the falling apart of the embers, it halted, slightly raised its head and looked about, as if seeking an enemy into which to launch its poison.

None appearing, its anger seemed to abate after a few seconds, and its head sank down again.

The stillness at this time was such that Dick again heard the peculiar rasping noise made by the sinuous body as it moved over the ground.

He wondered—for he could do nothing else but wonder—why it was that the serpent left the trapper and came for him.

The thought occurred to him that perhaps he was fonder of boys than of men.

Several times he tried to cry out, in the hope of awaking Sam, who would find some means of killing the reptile before he could inflict any injury.

But when he opened his mouth to shout, the tongue refused to move, and the only utterances escaping him were such as are made by a strangling person.

A sort of terror that this would hasten the blow of the reptile caused him suddenly to desist, and he lay huddled up, with the blanket covering every part except his white face, shivering as if he had the ague, and waiting until the snake was ready to doom him to death.

It is not to be supposed that the serpent had come out from his hiding-place, wherever it was, on purpose to kill the boy.

Snakes don't do that sort of thing.

The chilly air no doubt angered it, and it was looking around a little before withdrawing into winter quarters again.

But Dick Stoddard was sure it had come out for no other purpose than to kill him, and he had no doubt it would do so.

His excited mind ran into all sorts of channels, and he began to speculate as to where the snake was likely to strike him.

Would it be in the foot, the knee, the arm, the hand, or the face?

Which of these would cause death the soonest?

Which would be the most painful? How would he perish?

Would he swell up until he burst?

Would he become crazy, and die without being conscious in his last minutes?

Would he live a half-hour or a half-day, after receiving his wound?

Was there any remedy for the bite of the venomous rattlesnake?

If Black Sam should awake the second after his young friend was struck, would he be able to bring forward any remedy?

Was it not almost certain that the snake would turn and bite him before he could learn his danger? and thus the two, it would seem, were doomed to fall victims to the single reptile.

A hundred thoughts similar to these surged through his brain, as he lay crouched and huddled together, awaiting the moment when his master should choose to put him out of his misery.

The tiny flame that had sprung up from the breaking apart of one of the embers gradually died out again, until the gloom was the same as before.

But, although the body of the snake itself was invisible, yet the boy never lost sight of the eyes.

It was one of these that he had discerned at first, burning with that intense, vivid lustre.

But now he saw both, the snake having shifted so that they could be seen, gleaming like twin stars, as the hideous head continually varied its position, now sinking and rising, now swaying from right to left, and then again stationary.

It would seem impossible that, in the dark

ness of the night, the reptile should possess the power to exercise that strange, subtle spell which holds not only the senses of birds captive, but enchains equally the powers of man himself.

It is more likely that the excessive fear of the boy would have made itself equally manifest had the danger appeared in the shape of some wild beast which is known to be totally lacking in that inexplicable gift of nature.

But Dick Stoddard had tried to speak, and the words were inarticulate sounds.

He had sought to move, but his limbs were as if they were dead.

Never once during these dreadful moments did he remove his eyes from those of the rattlesnake, which were the same glittering points of fire that appeared to burn into, and through and through his brain.

It seemed, during all this time, that the reptile was advancing, and yet it reached him not.

At times, he was sure it was so close to his face that he could feel the heat, and then again it receded until it was rods away in the breathless darkness.

Whether the serpent strove to exert its power or not can only be conjectured.

But, after a time, the charm over the lad was complete, and he lay as helpless as if held within the arms of Hercules himself.

The trapper slept on, and was not to awake for hours yet—not until daylight should come.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS.

How long Dick Stoddard lay in the cañon, by the smouldering camp-fire, a victim to the malignant, subtle power of the rattlesnake, he never could form any reasonable idea.

He was in such an abnormal mental condition that he lost all idea of time, space, and even of the world in which he lived, moved, and had his being.

During those awful minutes it was as if nature held life and its powers in suspense.

The subsequent action of the reptile justifies the theory that this extraordinary power was really exerted without any volition of its own.

It may be that the boy was in so highly susceptible a nervous condition that he was peculiarly exposed to such a spell.

In recalling that memorable night, at the questioning of his friend Black Sam, he said that the first thing like an awakening which

he could remember came with the disappearance of the reptile.

The two eyes that burned into his very soul seemed to recede and increase in size, while they assumed a spinning, whirling motion that caused them to resemble two fiery wheels, revolving and turning in upon each other with bewildering swiftness.

These revolutions were at the rate of millions of times to the minute.

Suddenly they went out in blank darkness, and he felt that he was regaining control of himself; he heaved a great sigh, and found he could move his limbs, and no doubt he would have speedily recovered his entire self-possession, had he not at the critical moment discovered that the snake was nearer to him than it had been at any time since he became aware of its proximity.

Attracted by the warmth of the body of the boy, it coiled up, and was lying against his very body with simply the thickness of the blanket separating them.

A peculiar bedfellow, indeed!

Dick could not see the horrid reptile, which seemed to have come with the determination

to stay, but there was no room for any doubt as to its identity, and, curiously enough, the poor, terrified boy instantly felt his old utter helplessness of horror come back upon him with the same irresistible power.

All that he could do now was to do nothing.

It seemed as though the serpent was in no hurry to destroy him, and he began to feel a growing hope that possibly Black Sam might soon awake, and be able to afford him relief from his awful situation.

It is useless to dwell upon the torture of the boy.

No one can form any adequate idea of his experience who has not had something of the same nature himself, and we trust that no such affliction may ever be visited upon any of our readers.

While the helplessness of Dick Stoddard was the same, yet, relieved of those burning, star-light points of light, he was able to note more accurately the passage of time, and, with a relief which no one can understand, he saw by the growing light in the cañon that the long, dreary, dismal night was ending, and day was at hand.

The snake had just begun to crawl away, passing within a few feet of where the boy was lying, when one of his legs gave a sudden twitch, of such a violent character that it amounted to really a kick. The reptile, at this moment, was no more than a yard from his face, and it instantly stopped, roused and angered by such a slight disturbance even as that.

Naturally sluggish in its movements as is the *crotalus* species, yet, as is well known, it is capable of lightning-like quickness. In the present instance the reptile immediately threw itself in coil as a preliminary movement toward burying its fangs, surcharged with poison, in the cheek of the boy.

Poor Dick Stoddard was as helpless as ever, and utterly incapable of so much as covering his head with the blanket grasped in his trembling hand. He could only lie still and wait for the fatal shooting forward of the hideous head, whose disproportionate jaws were distended to their fullest extent, as if the serpent would increase the horror which it had inspired from the first.

The lad saw nothing but the impending blow;

and so it will be understood why he failed to observe the blanket of Sam, which was lifted to one side, just enough to free one arm. At the same instant, his brawny hand was thrust out, there was a flash, a sharp report, and the well-aimed shot from the revolver of the trapper shattered the head of the rattlesnake so completely that nothing remained, and the long sinuous body instantly began doubling and writhing in its death-struggles.

Back and forth the whirling, twisting mass plunged, tearing up the dirt and ashes, until all at once it shot back in the cavity and lay still.

By this time Dick had recovered his senses, and springing to his feet, he saw his friend the trapper standing with folded arms, looking as if he were amused at what he had just witnessed.

“Wall, Dick, the next time you see one of them ’ere critters, you mustn’t wait for me to wipe it out, but bang away yerself.”

The boy heaved a great sigh, and when the hunter gazed upon the white face before him, he suspected that he had gone through some terrible trial, although he was far from com

prehending the whole experience of the last few hours.

"You look as if you had been scared a little," added Sam, in a more kindly voice; "thar's plenty of them kind of birds roostin' in this part of the world."

"I never came so near dying in all my life; I feel dizzy and sick yet."

And then Dick Stoddard proceeded to tell, in his own way, as well as he could, the history of those dreadful hours which seemed to hold the agony of a lifetime.

Black Sam was able to appreciate and sympathize with the lad who had undergone so much, and he did his utmost to make him throw off the gloom that still clung to him. He assured him that many a man would have gone under if placed in the same position, and then, by one of his waggish stories, which he knew so well how to tell, he managed to make him feel and act something like himself.

"Wall, Dick, we've got 'bout enough fodder to stay our stomachs till dinner-time, so let's swaller it and get out of this place, which I rather guess you don't view as the loveliest spot that the sun ever shone on."

Dick's appetite speedily rallied, and his companion was greatly relieved to observe that about all the traces of the night's horror had disappeared.

The horses had improved their time, and found enough grass to put them in good condition for the day's travel before them.

Despite the threatening character of the weather, not a drop of water had fallen during the night in the cañon, and, contrary to the usual order of nature at such times, there was a decided rising of the temperature—so much, indeed, that the blankets were found anything but comfortable in riding. They were, therefore, laid aside until a change should take place in the opposite direction, the trapper assuring his companion that it would not be long in coming.

As Black Sam had predicted, they emerged from the cañon a little before noon, and found themselves once more in a hilly, mountainous country, broken by gullies, ravines, gorges, and precipices which made one dizzy to look down.

“How much farther, Sam, must we go, before we reach the region where you told me

you set traps for the beavers?" inquired Dick, after they had picked their way along for some distance.

The hunter looked up to the sky and at the hills and mountains around, as if he expected them to help him answer the question.

"Wall, I've hunted and trapped all through this territory, and made some of the best hauls that you ever sot eyes on; but the place is purty well cleared out, so that I find it's best to go some fifty miles farther on."

"And do you think we'll make it to-day?"

"Not onless a lot of Injuns git after us, and that's one of them things that it ain't safe to bet on. Howsomever, I think we'll make one more camp to-night, and then, if nothin' onexpected don't happen, we'll strike it by daylight to-morrow."

This was welcome information to Dick, who had had such a taste of life in this part of the world that he was very willing to forego any more of it. Besides this, all the excitement of new scenes, attended as they were with danger of the most thrilling nature, could not keep away the terrible homesickness that came upon him at all hours of the day and night.

He loved the rough, scarred, shaggy trapper, whose affection for him grew and strengthened, and who, when he saw the sad, weary look steal over the boy's face like a cloud before the sun, suspected the cause, and did all in his power to win him away from his gloomy thoughts.

Since they had eaten all the game in their possession, it became necessary to procure more; and as they were in a country abounding with streams, and as all streams abounded with fish, at least in that part of the world, it was agreed that they should make a dinner upon them, which Sam insisted should be furnished by Dick Stoddard himself.

The weather still remained mild and pleasant, and Dick was glad of the chance to try his hand in the way of hauling in a few fish, there being a little pride, which was natural in one of his years, not to disappoint the expectations that the trapper very plainly reposed in him.

It was an easy matter to procure the bait, which was nothing but the ordinary angle-worm, as it is termed.

"Now, you'll find the stream over yonder,"

said Sam; "about as good a place as you'll want. Fling in thar anywhar, and you won't have to wait long; only be sartin' and fotch enough to give us all we'll want."

Dick started off, hopeful of bringing back all that they could possibly need.

The stream to which the trapper had directed him was a small, rapidly running brook, no more than a dozen feet in width, quite clear, and with a depth so great that he could see nothing of the bottom a single yard from shore.

Dick had learned enough of fishing to know that it was useless to throw his line in such a rapid current, so he sought out a projection of the shore, behind which there was just the sort of an eddy that was sure to be a favorite with the fish, no matter what their particular nature might be.

The line was scarcely thrown in when there was such a vigorous pull that he jerked in at once, and, to his delight, he found he had hooked a piscatorial prize, weighing at least three pounds.

"We won't need to catch many like that to give Sam and me all we can eat," he exclaimed, as he loosed the hook from the fish's mouth.

"I think another as big, or even a little smaller, will be plenty. So here goes again," he added, as he flung out the bait once more.

But the second fish did not come quite so readily as the first.

It may have been that the sudden disappearance of one of their number was the cause of some caution on the part of the companions.

But Dick was determined to haul in another before going back, as Sam had taken pains to tell him that he would have abundant time at his disposal.

It was the intention of the trapper to improve the halt by cleaning their two guns, after which he meant to kindle the fire, and, as he expressed it, take things easy, as there was no reason why they should not do so.

Assured, therefore, of being alone, Dick sat down to his work with the deliberation of a veteran who has long since learned that patience must have its perfect work in the work of catching fish, as well as in the moral world.

By and by there was a cautious nibble, but it did not amount to enough to induce him to draw in the line.

"I wonder whether Sam has thought there

are Indians about here," said Dick, giving expression to a fear that had been creeping over him for the last few minutes. "He has sent me off without my gun, and he's sat down to clean them; suppose a whole lot of Indians should come along while he is at that. What would he do? I guess he couldn't do anything—hello! there's another bite, and it's a big one, too! Ah! I've got you, old fellow!"

And so he had; the great weight tugging at his line proving that the fish was larger than the former, the danger being that the cord was not large and strong enough to hold it.

But, fortunately, it proved equal to the strain, and he succeeded in landing, with considerable difficulty, as fine a specimen as one could see in many a day.

"There!" he exclaimed, almost as much pleased as when he sent the fatal shot into the antelope. "There isn't any more use in fishing, for all that we catch we'll have to throw away; so I'll stop, and go back to where Sam is fixing the guns."

He was in the act of getting his fish in shape, so as to carry them more conveniently, when a slight noise cause him to look up, and his

consternation may be imagined when he saw, not more than a dozen feet away, a brawny, muscular Indian warrior, painted and armed from head to foot.

Dick had just straightened up, with the heavy fish grasped one in each hand, when, as he confronted the frightful-looking redskin, he dropped both, and simply stared at the savage in terror.

The latter could not but know how great fear he inspired in an unarmed and helpless foe, especially one of such years as the youth that stood before him.

"Me kill," were the first cheerful words he uttered in his broken English, "little white papoose—take scalp—shoot—cut head off—kill—shoot—gin."

This was a terrible threat beyond all question, and, awe-inspiring as it was, it was hardly capable of adding to the apprehension of Dick, who supposed, as a matter of course, the redskin would put him to a sudden and shocking death.

He stood a minute gazing at him, and then he furtively turned his head, to learn whether Sam was anywhere in sight.

The Sioux—for such he was—observed the movement, and understood what it meant.

“Why you look?” he asked. “No man there—man gone!”

“Where is he gone?” asked Dick, finding his tongue for the first time. “I left him only a short time ago.”

“Me kill him—shoot—scalp—kill—heap—big Injin—whoop—oogh—oogh!”

This astounding information would have added to the terror of the boy, had not the Sioux laid it on a little too thick.

Dick was sure that the redskin was uttering a falsehood, with the intention of deceiving him.

It was clearly impossible that the savage should have been the author of the trapper's death.

The Indian showed he had been in no such desperate scrimmage as would have been inevitable had he attempted to get the better of so herculean-limbed a fellow as Black Sam.

The only way in which an advantage could be gained was by taking a stealthy shot at him, and that could not have been done without the report being heard by Dick, who was within a comparatively short distance.

Still it would hardly do to intimate to the Indian that he was guilty of an attempt to deceive, and Dick simply tried to look as if he believed the astounding statement.

It seemed to the boy that the wisest and, indeed, the only thing he could do, was to gain all the time possible, in the hope that the suspicions of the trapper would be excited by his absence, and he would appear in time to prevent the hostile from carrying out the threats that he had uttered.

It is no very pleasant task to entertain a wild Sioux Indian, whose special errand in calling is to obtain your scalp as a trophy of the interview; but when one is compelled to believe that his life depends upon that course, he is apt to try pretty hard to talk about something.

The first question of Dick's was not very well chosen, which was natural under the circumstances.

"What made you kill the white man? He was a great hunter."

"Sioux kill all white men—white men dogs—shoot—kill—scalp—oogh!"

The redskin's knowledge of the English language could not be considered very perfect;

but there was a native vigor that made up for this lack of linguistic lore.

Dick felt a great desire to say something to the Indian that would recommend the trapper to his good graces; but when he recalled that Black Sam had made his greatest reputation as a slayer of those people, he failed to see in what way this object was to be obtained.

"We are only going through your country," said the boy. "We do not mean to stop any longer than we have to; I just caught a couple of fish for our dinner, and if you would like some, I'll let you have all you want."

The Indian looked very much as if he did not exactly comprehend what the pale-face was driving at, but he was not at a loss for words to reply in his characteristic way:

"Little pale-face lie—all country Injin's—white man try steal—Injin great warrior—shoot all white men—scalp—shoot—kill."

This specimen of the red man seemed to have his pet words and expressions, judging from the phrases that fell from his lips.

During the interview, thus far, the Indian had occupied a position some fifteen or twenty feet distant; but he now began to show a dis-

position to shorten the space between them. As he uttered the last word he strode forward a couple of steps, and placed his hand upon the knife at his waist. Dick shrank back, intending to cry out and run the instant the critical moment should come.

The Sioux must have observed this action upon the part of the boy, but he instantly paused and stood motionless, probably feeling that the little fellow was his beyond all possibility of escape, and he chose to act the part of the cat, which is fond of playing with the mouse before making a feast upon it.

There can be little doubt that the Indian intended from the first to destroy the boy before him; but, as the highest earthly enjoyment for one of his race is to witness the suffering of a fellow-mortal, it may have occurred to him, while keeping up his jerky conversation, that it would be a much wiser and more satisfactory proceeding to take the little fellow home with him as a prisoner. By this means he would earn the everlasting gratitude of all the warriors, squaws, and children, down to the toddling papooses in his tribe.

What a treat it would be to see the white

prisoner writhe under the torture which they would be sure to apply!

Some such thoughts must have passed through the head of the warrior, to cause him to change his intention, as shown in the sudden stoppage when in the very act of advancing to carry out his purpose of putting him to death.

"White dog go with big Injin," said the red-skin, once more striding toward the shrinking boy.

"Do you mean to kill me?" asked Dick, uncertain as to whether he should cry out and try to make his escape by starting on a run in the direction of where he supposed Sam to be, or whether he should stand still a little while longer, in the hope of gaining a few more minutes, in which it was possible the trapper might come to his rescue.

"No; me no kill—me take home—make my son—grow big warrior."

This proposition was an improvement on that of sudden death, and Dick drew a great sigh of relief; for no one could realize more vividly than he that while there was life there was hope.

"Yes," he answered, "I'll go with you and

become a great warrior; I'll be your son, for my father is dead."

"Come with me," added the savage in a somewhat more conciliatory manner than he had shown heretofore; "white boy will be great chief of Sioux—kill good many white men."

This was not a very winning prospect to one of Dick's disposition, who could have no wish to grow up into a chief of a tribe of Indians, whose claim to glory should rest upon the number of white men whom he should kill.

By affecting a cheerful consent he had hope of winning the forbearance, not to say goodwill, of his captor; but, more than all, he was sure of gaining time thereby, for Black Sam to acquaint himself with the situation of affairs. The trapper had only to learn what had taken place to cause him to take a hand in the business; and when he undertook anything of that sort he generally succeeded in doing effective work.

As Dick had done so well so far, he concluded to try something in the way of strategy.

"Will my father let me go back and get my gun?"

This, as the expression goes, was a little too thin, and it failed to accomplish the purpose intended. The Indian would have shown himself more stupid than mankind are generally made had he consented to anything of the sort.

“The Sioux great warriors—have many guns—give white boy all want—come ’long—go with warrior—make him son.”

There seemed to be no help for it, and Dick prepared to accompany his captor.

CHAPTER VII.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

DICK STODDARD would have preferred to wait longer, but he dared not presume further upon the forbearance of the Sioux warrior, whose leniency had already shown itself in a most unaccountable manner, and which, it is safe to say, would not have stood any further trespass upon his part.

Accordingly, he left the fish lying upon the ground, and signified, by his look and manner, that he was ready to obey the orders of his new master.

"Where man?" inquired the redskin, seemingly forgetful of the declaration he had made but a short time before.

"I left him back yonder a little way, cleaning his gun, and mine, too. After he had got through that he meant to get a fire ready, so as to cook the fish which I caught."

The Indian stood for several minutes looking

in the direction indicated, as if expecting to see the individual about whom he had just made inquiry.

But rocks and trees, filled in with dense undergrowth, shut off any extended view in that direction, and the redskin at last turned around with the purpose of marching off with his captive.

The lad had entertained the hope, up to this moment, that this occasion would afford him a good chance to give his captor the slip.

But all such intentions were dashed by the course of the Sioux, who motioned him to take the advance, while he followed in the rear, where he could watch every movement of the lad, and defeat any purpose that he might be revolving in his mind as to giving him the slip.

"I wonder how long before Sam will miss me?" thought Dick, as he obeyed the savage. "If he don't come pretty soon it will be too late, for I suppose this fellow has lots of other Indians near-by."

Try as much as he might, the boy could find very little in his situation that gave him ground for hope.

It seemed to him that he might be absent a whole hour without causing any misgiving upon the part of Sam, who would merely conclude that the fish, owing, perhaps, to the lateness of the season, were not disposed to bite as readily as usual.

It might be several hours, indeed, before his fears would lead him to start on a hunt for the young fisherman.

The Indian indicated that the boy should follow a course that led directly up the stream from which the fish were taken, and Dick had scarcely started, when he played a little trick that would have done credit to one of a great many more years than he.

Like the land all around them, the surface was much broken, and the boy had taken but a step or two when he stumbled on purpose.

At the instant of striking, he gave utterance to a sharp cry, loud enough to be heard a considerable distance.

The Indian jerked out his hunting-knife, and with his painted face aflame with passion, made a rush at him.

Dick dropped upon his knees, threw up his

hands, and let out a scream louder than before, and which contained no notes that were not genuine.

The Indian was furious, and could not forgive such an exposure of the game, even though he believed it involuntary.

The hair of the boy was short, but his captor seemed determined to secure the scalp, and no doubt would have succeeded but for the reason that he was prevented.

He had not yet succeeded in getting a firm hold of the short locks, when a sharp, clear voice rang out:

“Hold thar!”

The Indian paused, with one hand in the hair of the cowering boy, and with the other resting on the handle of his hunting-knife.

He turned his head toward the point whence came the voice, and, as he did so, he was just in time to catch the flash of a gun not more than a dozen yards away.

That gun was held in the hands of Black Sam, the trapper, and the aim was as true as ever made by hunter. It may be truly said that the Sioux never knew what killed him. He had time scarcely to utter the single out-

cry, which all Indians are supposed to give as the breath leaves the body.

The hand upon the knife made a spasmodic movement, which did not quite succeed in drawing the weapon forth, and he fell forward at the very feet of him whom he intended to slay.

"Now, Dick," called out the trapper, "I want you to go back and pick up them 'ere fish, and carry 'em to the camp-fire; it would sarve you right if I made you dress 'em, too, and I'd make you do that same thing ef I thought you knowed how; but bein' as you don't, I'll 'tend to that part of the business meself."

It was characteristic of the man that he made no reference to the deed which he had just done. He comported himself as if unaware that he had sent a soul into eternity, the fact that he was clearly justifiable, doubtless, having much to do with his manner.

With the boy, the case was different. He was shocked beyond expression. He stood for a full minute staring, as if bewildered and dazed by what had taken place before his eyes, and it was not until the trapper spoke in a

sharp tone that he roused himself and seemed to understand the words spoken.

"I wish, Sam, that you would hurry and get all the furs you need, so we can leave such a dreadful country as this. If things go along this way, I can never stand it."

"That ain't the way to talk, Dick, though I kin understand how a little matter like this would sorter stir you up; but you must get used to such things. Come, if we are to get to the trapping-grounds to-morrow, we must hurry up our dinner and be off."

Dick followed his friend to where the fishes were lying on the ground, just as he had left them. The hunter picked them up, and, as he walked along, swung them as gayly as if he had been on a mere fishing excursion.

"We've been so long without anything of this kind, that a dinner of fish will taste good; what do you think?"

"I suppose so," replied Dick, who felt that he must say something in answer to the remarks of his friend.

"Wall, we'll soon see 'bout that. I've got everything ready and waiting."

The fire had been kindled before the trapper

left to go in quest of his young friend, and all that was necessary now was to lay the fish on the coals and let them broil.

During the brief period thus occupied, Sam related how it was that he came to reach the spot in time to save his young friend, in the hands of the Sioux Indian.

"You see, you hadn't been gone long when, all at once, an idea of the queerest kind came into my head. I felt that I'd done a very foolish thing in sending you off that way without so much as a gun, the queer part of the business bein' that I didn't think of it before I sent you. Wall, it struck me so hard that I couldn't drive it away; that ain't the first time that I've had such warnings, and I've always found that it's the safest plan to foller 'em. I had finished cleaning the guns, and I slapped a charge into mine without waitin' to load yours; then I just travelled after you, and you know that I didn't reach you any too soon."

"How was it the Indian didn't kill me as he said he meant to do when he first caught me?"

"Did he tell you that?" asked Sam, in surprise.

"Yes; and he told me that he had killed you, too."

"That's the way with all of them varmint you meet in this part of the world. They have 'nough of our style of talkin' to brag and blow of what they can do; I hope you didn't believe what he told you 'bout raisin' my hair."

"I was a little scared at first, but when I come to think, I knew he wasn't telling the truth."

"No, my boy, it will never do to think anything truth that you hear an Injin tell."

"It seems to me that if there is one Indian near here, there is apt to be more."

"Your head is level on that p'int, Dick; you couldn't very well go amiss on that, anyway. Injins are as nat'ral to this part of the country as rattlesnakes and all sorts of varmints."

"How near do you think the others are to us?"

"This one that we just put to sleep may have come from the camp-fire which we seen a mile or two away; and then again it may be that thar's a whole party of 'em within a few hundred yards of whar we be this very minit."

"If that is so they must have heard your gun go off, and they will be looking to see what it means, won't they?"

"Thar your head ain't so level, Dick. S'pose the varmints did hear the gun, they'll think that it was fired by the Injin himself, don't you see? and then he might be gone a whole day without thar thinkin' that he'd run inter any trouble."

"But we've had a fire going, and it may be that they have seen it, and if they have, I should think they will be looking after us."

"You're right, Dick, and now that we've got our fill of fish, we'll be off. Come, let's jump aboard our hosses and start."

Dick Stoddard was only too glad to follow the suggestion of his friend.

The beasts appeared as anxious to be off as their riders, and the latter were scarcely in the saddles when they were under way at as rapid a gait as the ground would allow.

Black Sam showed by his manner that he did not feel easy over their situation.

He picked their route with greater care than before, cautioned his young friend against speaking too loud, and asked him

to keep a sharp watch for all signs of their enemies.

"You see, we're so close to the beaver runs, whar we are to stay a while, that I want too slide into 'em without any of the varmints ob-sarvin' us."

"Can't we do it to-night by travelling after dark? There isn't any moon, and they won't be able to see us."

"Wall, that will help some, I s'pose, but we can manage it to-day if we have good luck and take care of ourselves."

The country through which they were journeying at this time was nearer level than any they had passed over since morning.

It had the appearance of a valley, broad, spacious, and walled in on each hand by mountains, varying in height from a few hundred to two and three thousand feet.

These elevations of land were several miles apart, and they continued as far forward as the eye could penetrate.

The trapper stated that their destination lay at the termination of this valley, which was less than twenty miles away.

The space of land lying between these moun

tain ranges, including tens of thousands of acres, was covered almost entirely with a stunted growth of oak, with here and there a few pine and cottonwood.

It was a noticeable fact regarding the last-named tree that its bark was a great favorite with the two horses.

Sam told the boy that they frequently ate it in preference to grass.

As they rode along, the trapper narrowly scrutinized the sloping sides of the mountain ranges on their right and left.

The veteran was on his mettle now, determined not to be caught napping.

The afternoon was nearly gone before any sign was discovered, and even that did not amount to enough to cause them any particular misgiving, it being simply a thin, spiral column of smoke that was fully two miles away on their left.

He supposed it came from the camp of an enemy, as a matter of course; although Sam stated that some of his old acquaintances, and some who were not friends, occasionally penetrated into this part of the world in quest of peltries and game.

It was not impossible, although very improbable, that there was a camp of white men there.

Besides this, there were rumors of gold, even at that day, among the Black Hills.

These rumors were little more than whispers that were repeated by a few hunters and trappers that had been in the habit of visiting these dangerous regions for many years; but, as such stories have been told regarding every part of the great West since the discovery of gold in California, nothing like a general belief was obtained until a few years since.

While the view of the two was extended in every direction, yet at the same time they themselves were peculiarly exposed to observation from any who might be passing along, or camping upon the slope of the mountain.

As the night closed in and the sun disappeared behind the peaks on their left, the trapper expressed himself as pretty well convinced that they had escaped attracting the attention of any of the numerous bands of Indians that were always prowling through the country, and he was quite hopeful of reaching the trapping-grounds without further molestation from them.

To Dick Stoddard, as to many an older person, it was a mystery how the old hunter could read so unerringly signs that seemed absolutely hidden from other eyes.

Often, when riding along, Sam would call the attention of his young friend to little indications of the work of their enemies which a day's searching would have failed to reveal to him.

Fully a half-dozen times as they were journeying in this fashion the trapper would suddenly point to the ground, and say:

"See thar, Dick; that's a purty plain trail, ain't it? If they knowed a couple of gentlemen like us war comin' 'long this way, they would've been more careful, wouldn't they?"

And then the youth would look and do his utmost to discover what the particular signs were to which he referred, and unable to distinguish them he would answer:

"I don't see how they could be more careful, when I can't find anything at all that looks like the tracks of a horse or man."

"Is it possible?" asked Sam, in genuine surprise. "Why, I don't understand how you can help seeing them when they are as plenty

as blackberries in August; but then I s'pose a feller has to larn such things the same as every thing else. Thar be some little cranks and things and notions that I don't know."

"Hello! do you hear that?" exclaimed the boy, as a rumble of thunder seemed to come from the mountain on their right.

The trapper looked attentively at the sky in front, and on either hand, and shook his head.

"We'll catch it this time, sartin sure."

"Do you mean to say a storm is coming?"

"There ain't any doubt of it; I've travelled too long in these parts to make a mistake 'bout such a simple thing as that; yes, it is goin' to come down in the old-fashioned style; and when it does blow and rain in this part of the world, it takes the hide off."

"Where will we be when it begins?"

"Safe in shelter; thar's hardly a mile of land atween here and Omaha that I hain't been cotched in by a storm, so I make it a p'int to have some hole that I can crawl inter. If it should begin inside of half an hour I'd run you inter a place whar not a drop of water could wet a hair of your head. So, Dick, be easy on that, will you?"

"What you say, Sam, I'll always believe," replied the boy, with no little feeling; for at that moment there came an overwhelming sense of the great service his friend was rendering him in devoting so much of his time and earnings to the use of one of whom he had never heard until a short period before.

Sam had told enough during the time which they had spent together to let him see that his profession was not only attended with great personal peril, but at the same time was one of the least remunerative pursuits in the wide world.

The old scarred hunter seemed touched by this evidence of the confidence of the youth. He was silent a minute, as if in deep thought, and then looking toward the little fellow, he said, in a voice strangely modulated:

"Do you know, Dick, that I'd rather be skulped, shot, and shoved clean under than to have you ever feel that you'd made a mistake in sayin' that 'ere what you said just now? It's done me more good than anything that's happened to me since I stood at my dyin' mother's bedside. But come; we've just 'bout time to get to cover—the storm is almost on us.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STORM IN THE NORTHWEST.

SAM the trapper and Dick Stoddard had barely time to reach shelter when the storm burst upon them.

In such a country as that through which they were travelling it is a comparatively small matter to find security against all the elemental disturbances to which the region is subject.

Some of the grandest exhibitions of nature are seen in the West and Northwest.

Vast, towering mountains, cañons of almost fathomless depth, yawning precipices, caverns of breathless darkness, monarchs of the wood, with a height and spread hardly equalled in any other part of the world—all these, and much more, characterize that region, which, in many respects, is unsurpassed by any other on the globe.

The shelter to which our two friends fled before the coming storm was like those that

may be found in almost any part of the West, consisting of merely a mass of rocks piled together in such profusion that the wonder would have been to fail to find the refuge which they sought.

Hastily dismounting, they as hastily unstrapped their luggage, and with all in their arms, ran to the haven just as a few large drops of water gave token of what was coming.

"Here we are," called out the trapper, as he threw himself upon his knees and crawled forward a few feet; "hurry 'long, Dick, for thar is a young deluge comin'; but we're just in time."

Indeed, they were none too soon, for at that moment a peal of thunder shook the earth as if it were rent by an earthquake.

At the same instant, a flame of sheet-lightning lit up the whole sky, causing the crags and cliffs to stand out with wonderful vividness and distinctness.

The horses were left to themselves, as the roof which covered the travellers was altogether too low to allow them to avail themselves of it.

Here, lying flat upon their faces, Sam and

Dick watched and listened to the raging of the tempest.

The flashing of the lightning and the ear-splitting peals of thunder were incessant. At times the whole heavens seemed on fire, while the booming and crashing made it appear as if all of "heaven's artillery" were bombarding the trembling earth below.

Even a veteran like the trapper was impressed with the sublime display of the power of nature, and the grand exhibition of the latent and terrific resources of the great magazine of the universe.

It would have been difficult for them to make themselves heard amid such an overpowering din and tumult.

Neither attempted, for a time, to speak, and it may be doubted whether they would have done so had they been sure of easy converse.

The descending torrents of rain, illuminated by the intense glare of lightning, looked like the innumerable spears of an army, and the drops of water were of a size scarcely credible.

They rattled upon the leaves and against the rock with a noise like that of immense hail-stones.

The violence of the concussion was such that a spray and mist rose from the ground, and the two were compelled to push further back in the cavernous retreat, to save themselves from a wetting from this source alone.

Remembering the narration of the trapper regarding the flood in which he and his companion were caught when in the cañon, Dick shouted his fear of something similar befalling them on the present occasion.

But Sam quieted his misgivings by assuring him that he had taken refuge in this very place at least a dozen times before, and it was impossible that anything of the kind should take place.

Gazing out from their secure shelter, the scene was impressive in the highest degree.

They were situated on quite an elevated piece of ground, so that, as they looked off toward the west, they saw not a little of the valley through which they had been riding.

This portion, as at first viewed, was made up mainly of boulders and black, jagged rock, which, under the deluging they received from the torrent of rain, speedily assumed an appearance of being covered with a sheeting of ice,

which glistened under the flaming lightning like burnished silver.

From these too, the recoil of the rain caused a thin, misty shower of water to rise, which had a peculiar appearance, rarely seen.

The two were gazing in silence upon the scene, lit up by the rapid flaming of lightning, when Dick was startled by the sound of falling water; it was not that caused by the rain itself, but resembled the pouring of some large stream over a precipice.

The cause was soon manifest. A current, equal to a goodly-sized creek, was rushing down the mountain side, in the rear of the pile of rocks which afforded the two their shelter, and, instead of running around the obstruction, as would seem to be the natural course, it poured directly over the whole mass.

The result was a sheet of water, fully twenty feet in width, and with a depth of several inches, shooting over the rocks immediately in front of our friends. Had this curtain been composed of clear liquid, free from impurity, the effect would have been beautiful in the extreme.

It would have been as if the fairies had spread

a veil of gauzy texture before their view to temper the vivid intensity of the lightning; but, unfortunately for such a fancy, the water was of the muddiest possible character, and acted more like an impenetrable shutter than anything else.

The fact that they were surrounded by a sheet of water could not but arouse the fears of Dick again. The instant he saw what was going on, he started to scramble out into the open air again; but the strong arm of the trapper restrained him.

"What you tryin' to do?" he shouted.

"I don't want to get drowned," was the answer.

"All you've got ter do, then, is ter stay whar you be;" and then, as might have been expected, Sam supplemented his order with the statement that he had seen the same thing before, and indeed had lain in precisely the same position when a similar exhibition took place.

This served to keep the boy still, although the scene was so startling that it can hardly be said his fears were wholly removed.

The storm, as might have been expected, was

as short as violent. In a few minutes there was a sensible diminution in the depth of the cataract pouring over the rocks. It speedily grew less and less, until breaks were distinguished here and there, and shortly after it ceased altogether. Then, as their view was cleared once more, they observed that the rain itself had almost ended. They had but to look a short time longer, when the air was as free of the tempest as it was at the beginning of the day.

The thunder receded in the distance, until only a few sullen rumblings and mutterings were heard; the flashes of lightning grew of less intensity and further between, until they, too, were no more than faint quiverings of light, such as are seen at the close of a hot summer day, when the heat-lightning, as it is termed, plays along the horizon.

"I wonder what has become of the horses, Sam? They must have been scared by the noise of the thunder and the sharp flashes of lightning."

"They may be a mile off, for all I know."

"Then they are lost, if they are that far! What shall we do?"

"The best thing that I can think of is to go to sleep," was the characteristic answer of the trapper, as he prepared to act upon his own suggestion.

The promise of Sam had been fulfilled to the letter. The shelter to which he conducted his friend had proven a secure one in every respect.

At one time, it may be said of them, they were surrounded by water, and their situation seemed critical in the extreme; but all danger, if indeed there were at any time real danger, was now happily past, and it only remained for the friends to make themselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

Supper, of course, was out of the question. The trapper said he was rather pleased than otherwise that they were placed in such a strait, for it was time that the boy began to learn to undergo hunger and privation.

No boy is particularly anxious to take lessons in that school, but as there seemed no way to avoid it at this time, Dick could do nothing less than submit.

Thanking Heaven for its watchful care over him in the past, he lay down beside his companion, and in a few minutes was asleep.

The night passed without anything occurring to disturb the two, and neither opened his eyes until the bright morning sun was shining in their faces, when, as might be supposed, the trapper was the first to regain his senses.

Both were ravenously hungry, but neither made reference to the fact.

Sam felt that it was useless, as some time must necessarily pass before anything in the way of food could be procured.

Dick Stoddard recalled what his friend said the night before, and he was resolved to starve before he would say anything that could be construed into a confession of weakness; but the trapper had no purpose of making too severe a strain upon the endurance of the little fellow.

"The first thing that we must do," said he, "is to hunt up the hosses; for don't you see that we can't do anything in the way of travelin' till we get the animals?"

Dick was tempted to reply that in his opinion it was equally impossible to do anything effective without a supply of something for the nourishment of the body; but he held out in his resolve to remain mute as to his sufferings in this respect, and so he kept his peace.

Leaving the rocks beneath which they had taken shelter, they emerged into the broad valley through which they had travelled so many miles the day before.

Signs of the violence of the storm were abundant on every hand; but the slope of the land was such that the water had run off rapidly, and there was little or no difficulty in making their way to the northward, that being the direction in which Sam was quite certain the horses had gone.

The rain had obliterated all signs of the trail of the animals, which, at any other time, would have been an unerring guide to where they had wandered, so that he found himself compelled to rely upon his own wits in making the search.

"I'm purty sartin'," said he, "that Screamer has gone toward the north, 'cause he has tramped over this ground with me often 'nough to know where we're aimin' at, and if he heads toward the north, he's goin' to take your Jack with him, you can be sartin."

"It seems to me, we ought to see some signs of them if that is the case; for I can look a long way ahead, and I can't make out a sign of anything like a man or animal; do you?"

Black Sam had ascended a high rock but a short distance from those that had served as a shelter, and in as elevated a position as he could secure, he was scanning the long stretch of country thus opened before him

He made no answer for several minutes.

“Thar might be a hundred hosses,” said he, as he leaped down to the ground again “and you could stand and stare till thar warn’t no eyes left in your head, and yet you wouldn’t see anything of ’em. Sometimes, when Screamer was a little frisky, he has slipped off and hid hisself, and you orter seen me look for him! That old tooth-pick would just stand still, in some spot, mebbe not more than fifty yards from whar he started, and if I haven’t just walked ’round and ’round that critter, sometimes near ’nough to spit a mouthful of ’bacca-juice in his eye, and yet I’d never set one peeper onto him. If you’ve ever hunted for a cow at home, you know how it is yourself.”

“If horses are anything like cows, when they get among the trees and know you’re looking for them, I know how hard it is to find them, for I’ve hunted them all the afternoon till

night, when I got so mad and tired that I've gone home crying, and then found out that I'd almost run against them more than once."

Nothing remained for man and boy to do but to hunt for the missing animals, and they set about it immediately, separating by a distance of fully a hundred yards, so as to make their search as effective as possible.

The trapper had already signalled to his steed several times without result. He was quite well satisfied that Screamer, wherever he was, heard the call, which was simply a long and shrill whistle, resembling the cry of a bird found in the Northwest.

It was so naturally executed that the suspicious ear of the Sioux and Blackfoot might easily mistake it for the voice of the bird itself, but the equine ears for which it was intended never erred, although they frequently pretended they did.

"I don't mind a joke now and then," said Sam, speaking as if he felt himself obliged to apologize for the conduct of his steed, "and you see, the worst of it is, Screamer knows it, and he's playin' off one of his little games on me. Wall, it ain't so nice when the joke takes

that shape, but thar ain't no use in getting mad over it, so here goes."

By this time the two were so far apart that anything like a conversation was out of the question, and henceforth, for a time, the hunt was prosecuted independently of each other.

The result was a surprise and agreeable disappointment to both.

Less than ten minutes elapsed, after the words just given, when, as Dick was passing a small clump of trees, he turned his head, and there, right before his eyes, stood the two animals for which they were looking.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAPPER'S HOME.

A shout called the trapper to the spot, and, as may be supposed, one was as much delighted as the other. The saddles and luggage were speedily transferred to the backs of the steeds, together with the owners themselves, and the journey toward the north resumed.

The sun was an hour high, and still nothing was said of food.

But Sam was on the lookout, with no intention of causing his young friend to wait longer than necessary.

It was hardly possible that any one should be compelled to look long for game in such a region, and the two were hardly under way when the trapper, who was slightly in advance, raised his gun and, without a word, fired.

"What did you shoot at?" asked Dick, looking in the direction of the aim, without detecting the target.

"Take a look inter them bushes over yonder, and see if thar's anything that'll do ter make a meal off of."

"Maybe you've shot something that isn't dead yet, and I'd rather wait till there isn't any danger of its hurting me."

"If it wasn't dead, you'd hear it flounderin' 'round thar; now, jist listen and tell me if you do."

All was still as the tomb.

Dick Stoddard had dismounted at the first suggestion of the trapper, and with his gun tightly grasped, and himself ready for any emergency, he advanced toward the dense growth of bushes that had been pointed out as the place where it was worth his while to look for the results of the shot.

They were found in the shape of a half grown buffalo, that had probably started out that day to see the world for itself and had met with rather a discouraging reception, inasmuch as **it** had been shot so dead by the trapper, that **it** barely gave more than a feeble expiring kick as it departed this life.

The creature was in capital condition, and was the most welcome sort of game that two

hungry travellers could have secured. Only a few minutes were needed to prepare it for the fire, but a longer time was required to prepare the fire for the meat, on account of the "moistness" that pervaded everything.

But the veteran hunter was equal to the emergency, and in a short time he had the fire under way, and in a still briefer period the morning meal was cooked and disposed of.

Then, strengthened and renewed, the last stage of their journey was undertaken and soon finished.

The valley through which they had been travelling for so long a time now widened out and lost its distinctive character, the mountain on either hand seeming to encroach upon the lower portion in such a way that it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began.

The journeying became more difficult and the scenery more broken and rugged—so much so, indeed, that in more than one place the two were forced to dismount and lead the way, while their animals followed them as best they could.

This was kept up for something like an hour,

by which time Dick was thoroughly out of breath.

The lad, however, sturdily held his peace, so far as anything like murmuring was concerned, and labored forward as if his life depended on his efforts.

All at once Black Sam stopped, and, with a sigh, said:

“Look around you, Dick, and tell me what you see.”

The boy had already done considerable looking, and replied that he did not notice anything very much different from that which they had been viewing for the last week or two.

“Wall, here we are going to stay for a week, or month, or two, or three, according to the way the beavers run.”

At this announcement Dick studied the situation more carefully, and was not a little puzzled to understand where they were to find accommodations that would serve to keep them comfortable during the severe weather to which they were likely to be exposed during the winter, now almost upon them.

But if it had answered as a secure shelter for so many seasons in the past, it was reason-

able to suppose that it would answer that purpose again.

The horses were once more unloaded of their burdens, even to their bridles, and then they were turned loose to shift for themselves.

"What's to hinder the Indians from taking them?" asked Dick, as the released steeds flung up their heels and dashed away, rejoicing in their newly found freedom.

"I don't know as thar's anything to hender, and that's one of the risks that we trappers always have to run in these parts. Howsum-ever, I'll say for your encouragement that, during all the years that I have spent in the trapping profession, I never failed to be able to get my horse when I wanted him."

The scenery surrounding their new home was of the same general character as that with which they had become familiar long since, and which had lost its power to interest the boy.

Off to the northward, and far to the west, in the very horizon, was to be seen a range of mountains, looking dim, misty, and blue against the sky.

They were many miles distant, and in keeping with the sublime scenery on every hand.

Immediately surrounding them were the rocks, ravines, gullies, chasms, precipices, and craggy steepes, from which Dick Stoddard had drawn back so many times, frightened and appalled.

There were trees, some of which were of considerable size.

As they stood upon a somewhat elevated position, they heard the murmur and distant roar of more than one waterfall.

The view to the south and east was of scarcely any extent at all, the country being so broken as to shut off the scope of the eye in that direction.

Although it was comparatively early in the autumn, yet there were signs of winter in the air.

The wind, as it whistled around the rocks and among the trees, had a dismal moaning, such as presages the snow-storm in more civilized parts of our country, and there was a crisp, keen vigor in the atmosphere, even when unstirred, that made the sunshine welcome to man and beast.

These were nights, too, when the camp-fire, kindled against the rocks, gave out a warmth

exceedingly grateful to the boy, who felt at the same time that, but for his blanket, he would have suffered a great deal already.

"Wall, now that you've looked around," said Sam, "we'll see what sort of a shanty we've got to make our home!"

CHAPTER X.

TRAPPING FOR BEAVERS.

HAVING made themselves familiar with the outside of the residence which they expected to occupy for some weeks or months to come, the two now took a view of the interior of their mansion.

Here, as in all other cases where the opportunity was given, Black Sam showed natural ingenuity.

It was impossible that in such endless confusion and tumbling of masses of rocks as were exhibited all round, there should not be some instances that could be turned to account.

The trapper led the way between some boulders for a distance, when Dick noticed that the passage was arched and covered overhead, its peculiar appearance showing that it had been done entirely by nature.

Continuing still forward the two entered a cavern some fifty feet in length, with a width

varying from a half-dozen to five times as many feet.

The height was of the same irregular nature as was shown at the entrance, where the head of Dick just missed touching the top, and at the farther extremity a dozen such boys, standing on one another's heads, would have failed to reach the roof.

Enough light entered this cavern home by the same avenue that admitted the man and boy to afford a twilight illumination of the interior, while there were slight crevices and cracks in the solid walls at the other end, to make the light at that portion more decided than anywhere else.

So it was that Dick's eyes required but a short time to become accustomed to the mild illumination of the interior, and he was able to form an intelligent idea of the dwelling-house of Black Sam, the trapper.

The cavern, as described, would have afforded shelter from storm and rain at any time, but it will be readily seen that it was naturally as cold and cheerless a place in winter as can be imagined. It was here that the ingenuity of the trapper displayed itself.

There was more room than was needed, and the rear portion, which was lighted as we have shown, was appropriated as the real retreat of the occupant of the place.

There Sam had covered the floor, sides, and roof with the skins of beavers and buffaloes, so well put in place that they had stood for years, and promised to stand many years more.

In the farther extremity was a fireplace, a number of stones of smaller size being placed in such position that a fire could be easily kindled, and at the same time no difficulty was encountered in getting rid of the smoke.

All this was well arranged, but there were other "points," which Dick did not learn until some time afterward.

Conducting him to the extreme rear, Sam showed his young friend an opening, something like a couple of feet in width, which he explained led nearly a hundred feet back, when it opened out to the world in a way that rendered it scarcely possible to discover it in passing near.

"You see, Dick, ef the varmints should become just a leetle too plenty 'round thar in front, why, it's well to have a back door."

Sam showed, still further, that he was always in a condition to with stand a prolonged siege. It was a settled policy with him to keep a supply of provisions on hand, enough to last, in case of emergency, several weeks; and, besides all this, the back passage was connected in some way with an underground stream of water, which, tiny as it was, was still amply sufficient to serve the purposes of a dozen men cooped up in the cavern and fighting for life.

We have shown that the trapper was as well provided for a winter's stay in the wilderness of the Northwest as he could well be. The efficiency of his stronghold had undergone a crucial test more than once.

Lying flat on his face near the mouth of the cavern, he had heard the Sioux howling for his life on the outside, while calm, cool, and collected as he always was, no matter how dangerous the occasion, he had held his fire, as was his practice, until he could make every shot tell. He had rolled the heavy stone to the entrance, and shot down every redskin that dared lay hands on it.

"I've laid in thar, Dick, many a time, when ten, fifteen, or twenty varmints on the outside

war yellin' and half crazy for my ha'r, and I not knowin' how soon they'd get it, too; but I jest kept low, and didn't say nothin' to nobody, 'ceptin' to ask the good Lord above to see me through the muss, and I jest loaded my gun and banged away every time I could draw a bead on a redskin. Then they'd try all sorts of tricks on me. They'd make believe they'd gone away, so as to throw me off the guard. I wouldn't hear nothin' fur hour arter hour, and, by and by, night would come, and it would be as dark as a wolf's mouth. Things couldn't have been more quiet and solemn if I war waitin fur my own f'm'ral to come 'long and put me away inter the grave; but, you see, they didn't shet the eye of this sinner. Mebbe it would be 'bout midnight when I'd hear a noise no louder than that made by the snake t'other night, that scared you out of a year's growth; but I knowed what it meant, and I jest waited my time. I could tell by the sound whar the redskin war, and when things looked gay, I dropped onto him, and it war good-by, big Injin."

"Do you have such trouble every winter, Sam?"

“No, not by no means; last season I spent three full months and more, and never had a redskin say ‘boo’ to me. The loveliness of this whole perfession to us is that you don’t know when the varmints are likely to make a call onter you; but I don’t think they’re likely to show their heads for a good while.”

The boy was glad to accept this assurance of his friend, and the two at once set about establishing themselves in their winter quarters.

Their blankets and luggage were carefully stowed away at the farther end of the room, and, as they both felt the need of food, Sam concluded to test the pemmican he had left behind him, months before, at the time he started on his return to Omaha with his peltries.

Pemmican is simply meat cut in long, thin strips, without fat, and afterward dried in the sun.

It is sometimes compressed into small bags, and is, therefore, a sort of condensed nourishment, very popular in Canada and the colder portions of our own country.

Besides being nutritious in the highest degree, it will keep a long time.

It is generally an important factor in the supplies of the different Arctic expeditions.

There was no special flavor in the specimens which Dick Stoddard tasted; but he pronounced a favorable opinion upon it, and, assisted by his ravening hunger, he made a substantial meal.

It did not take the two trappers, as they may as well be termed, long to adjust matters within the cavern, when, as the day was passing away, they started out to set the traps for the night.

Before doing so, Sam took a few minutes to climb a small tree near at hand, which he had often used as a point from which to take his observations.

The view from the crown of this pine was the most extensive that could be gained in the vicinity.

Black Sam tarried long enough to render his reconnoissance complete, and the result was as satisfactory as he could have wished.

Look in whatsoever direction he chose, no signs of the Sioux could be seen.

The distant hilltops, from which he had so often watched the smoke of the hostile camp-

fires, were now outlined against a sky whose atmosphere was unsullied by the slightest taint of vapor.

In a small opening, due north, a few buffaloes were grazing, and this alone was all the signs of life that met the eye.

The next proceeding was to make the round of the traps.

The cold season is manifestly the best time in which to take the skins of all fur-bearing animals, since the fur is then thicker and in the most marketable condition.

The traps used are made on the same general principle as those employed to catch game in civilized regions.

The beavers being unusually intelligent, the greatest pains and care are necessary to take them.

The favorite bait is an extremely odoriferous substance, obtained from the animal itself.

It is also indispensable that the contrivance which the trapper employs should be concealed from sight, else the intended prey is sure to give it a wide berth.

By the time they completed the circuit of the eight traps, the sun had set, and the early

twilight of the northern autumn was upon them.

Dick saw nothing of the animals which they expected to catch, nor, indeed, did Sam himself; for the greatest caution on their part would not have enabled them to approach nigh enough to gain a view.

But they observed several dams, and there were plenty of evidences that they were in a neighborhood where the fur-bearing animals abounded.

Supper was made from the store of pemmican, and it was quite early in the evening when they lay down to rest.

The weather grew decidedly colder during the night, and the thick blankets spread on the soft, heavy skins were no more than sufficient to keep Dick comfortable; but by nestling close to his big companion, who never appeared to suffer from any changes, the boy slept soundly until daylight, most of his dreams being of Indians and beavers.

Before the sun was up, Sam roused his young friend, and the two started off to visit their traps.

Whether the old trapper expected to find any-

thing in them or not could not be gathered from his manner.

He said, in answer to the queries of Dick, that sometimes he was lucky and sometimes he wasn't, and that was all that could be got out of him.

But the good fortune was certainly greater than either could have anticipated; for in the very first trap visited was a splendid specimen of the *Castor Canadensis*!

When the poor fellow caught sight of his foes, he gave utterance to such piteous cries that Dick's heart was stirred with pity, and he was on the point of beseeching Sam to let him go, when that individual quieted, or, rather, ended the matter, by killing the terrified creature.

The second trap was no more than a hundred yards off, and, making their way to this, what was their surprise to find that a beaver fully as large as the former was awaiting them!

By this time Dick was beginning to grow hard-hearted, and he never opened his mouth while Sam proceeded to end its days forever.

The third trap yielded nothing, and the fourth had been sprung, but the game was not there.

When the rounds were completed, they found they were in the possession of five fine specimens, which was certainly far better than they were warranted in expecting.

"I never beat that but twice," said Sam, "and that was a good many years ago; I thought we would p'raps have one, and mebbe two, but had no idea we war goin' to make any such haul as that 'ere."

"If we can keep that up——"

"We won't need no more than three or four weeks to scoop in enough to let us dig out of here; but thar ain't no use of lookin' fur any-thing like that. It ain't apt to rain steady fur a month, though we do get a screecher now and then."

"Do you have as big pay for furs as you used to do?"

"Bless you, no, nothing like it; if we did, I'd be a rich man by this time p'raps."

The beavers were carefully dressed, and their hides spread to dry in the sun.

Dick then made the discovery that a portion of these same animals afforded a very toothsome article of diet.

From the tails—the last portion that one

would have supposed was of any use—the trapper cut several pieces, which were cooked, much in the usual manner of preparing steaks, and Dick declared it to be as fine a breakfast as he had ever eaten.

“Thar be a great many things,” observed the old hunter, “which can be turned to account in this part of the world. I’ve seen the time when a pair of old Injun moccasins war looked onto as the only means of keepin’ three of us from starvin’ to death.”

“Sam, what are you going to do during these long days that we must spend here!”

“Wall, I’ve no doubt that you’ll find it rather slow sometimes; but, after you’ve been in the trappin’ perfession as long as me, you won’t mind it much.”

But, in spite of the novelty of the situation, and the excitement of hurrying out in the early hours of the morning to learn the fortune of the night before, the boy found many hours that were inexpressibly dreary.

Black Sam seemed to be carrying out his determination, as he expressed it, of putting in enough sleep to provide against any emergency

that might require him to use a week or two in keeping watch.

Besides spending most of the night in slumber, he frequently slept for hours during the day.

And, while the old trapper was thus employed, Dick was generally undergoing the miseries of brooding over the loss of his relatives and friends.

He sat figuring up the prospective catch of beavers, and trying to calculate about when they were likely to make their start for Omaha.

The catch varied very much, as might have been anticipated it never reaching the remarkable number shown the first morning.

There were occasions when it looked as if they were sure to secure all they could need within a single month.

Then again when several mornings came and went without bringing a single fur, the boy was in despair, and certain that they would be compelled to stay where they were until the coming of warm weather in the spring.

But for the anxiety of his young friend, Sam would scarcely have felt these changing fortunes.

At the end of a week, they were the owners of precisely one dozen beaver skins.

Sam had set down the number that was needed at fifty, which afforded enough room for "shrinkage."

It was not to be expected that the second week would be as successful as the first, while, as a general rule, there was a steady falling-off—so marked, in fact, that a change of quarters was sometimes rendered necessary.

As the season advanced, all the indications became less favorable for a speedy return to the States.

Before a month had passed, there came a tremendous fall of snow, so that when they looked out it was seen fully a foot deep on the level, and Dick was forced to stay in the house while Sam made the round of the traps, coming back at the end of an hour, just as he had done for the three mornings previous, without a single trophy of success.

Following the snow-storm were several weeks of weather similar to that near the North Pole.

The old trapper had made careful preparations for just such a "snap" as this, and he was not caught napping.

As furs and blankets were unequal to keeping out the cold, the fire was kindled, and with its aid they were made quite comfortable.

Dick could not but see that it would be madness to attempt to reach home during the arctic weather.

All that a person could hope to do was to keep from freezing to death; and thankful might he feel if it were his to own any shelter like that of Dick.

It is scarcely worth while to dwell upon the particulars of the winter spent by Dick Stoddard with Black Sam in the wilderness of the Northwest.

The weather was of the most fearful severity, the trapper himself declaring that, in all his experience, he had never seen it surpassed.

It must have been severe indeed when he cut away the ice and sprung the traps, after which he did not go near them for several days.

And then there came a single night—one that the veteran could not forget to his dying day—when he believed that both would freeze to death before morning.

He wrapped Dick up as warmly as possible, and built a fire on either side of him, while he

devoted himself to attending to them, alternating the work with dashing about the cavern, swinging his arms, and fighting off the fatal numbness creeping over him.

He never let Dick know, until long afterward, the awful peril of that one night. Two full months passed, during which it was simply a fight for life, without a thought of catching anything in the way of furs.

This memorable spell was not only severe, but it was long-continued, and it was not until well toward spring that they got fairly to work again.

When the old trapper saw the snow disappear and something like mild weather return, he made the tour of his traps, only to find that the Sioux had visited them while he and Dick were cowering in the cavern, and destroyed five.

Misfortunes rarely come singly, and pursuing his investigations further, he made the discovery that, during the biting weather, Jack, the little pony belonging to Dick, had frozen to death.

Screamer, like his master, was made of tougher stuff, and had managed to pull

through, though he must have had a hard time of it.

Sam did not let his young friend know what a calamity had befallen him, as the boy was already discouraged over the experience of the winter.

Three traps were nothing like the number needed to secure the supplies they had fixed upon as their quota, but Sam was hopeful that success would crown their labor and patience all in good time.

The proof which he had received that his old enemies, the Sioux, were giving him attention was another and a more serious matter. While Dick Stoddard was his companion, he wished to avoid all collisions with the redskins; for the chances were ten to one that the youth would be the sufferer.

As the spring was come, and they could travel without difficulty, he held himself in readiness to change their quarters at any time their safety might seem to demand it.

While Sam was in this state of doubt, the matter was decided, for the present at least, by an unexpected run of good luck.

For an entire week they caught two beavers

each morning, greatly to the encouragement of both.

The spring was fairly upon our two friends, and their supply of peltries was such that, although something short of the number originally agreed upon, they decided to make a start for home, when, a series of incidents befell them, of such an extraordinary character that we now proceed to give them to our readers.

CHAPTER XI.

A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

THE spring that succeeded the severe winter was all the more beautiful from the contrast.

Dick Stoddard was standing on the brow of a small hill a short distance from the cavern in which he had spent so many dreary days, looking off over the country, all radiant and glorious under the magic touch of renewing life. As he breathed in the pure bracing air, and recalled the promise of Black Sam that the start was to be made on the morrow, and that there was every reason to believe they would be in Omaha within a fortnight from that time, his spirits rose, and he could scarcely restrain his enthusiasm over the prospect.

A few minutes later, Black Sam, the trapper, appeared and called:

"Do you want to go on a hunt, Dick?"

"Yes, if there's any chance of finding anything."

"Wall, as I war comin' over the hill yonder, I seen two deer a-croppin' the tender buds of the young trees. I never had a better chance to fetch down one of the finest young critters that I ever set eyes on, and I was just 'bout to do it, when I happened to think of you; so I started down to tell you."

"It will suit me exactly," replied Dick; "where is the spot?"

The trapper came up alongside the boy, and pointed out the place where he had seen the game.

It was some three hundred yards distant, near a narrow but deep stream of water, on a branch of which the most successful trap of the winter had been set.

It took but a few minutes for the boy to gain a correct idea of where he was to look for the game, and he set out in quest of the creatures which are always so attractive to the hunter.

While he was thus occupied, Sam himself went off to make his last round of the traps.

It required a longer time for the boy to reach the place than he suspected, and when he got there, nothing was to be seen of the deer of which he was in quest.

"I suppose they took the alarm and left while Sam was on the way to tell me."

He stood a minute looking for the animals, and failing to detect anything, he made his way to a large tree, up which he climbed, so as to gain a better view; but when he reached the elevation he was greeted with a scene which he little counted upon, and which could not be called particularly pleasing.

Off toward the east, and between him and Sam, he saw five Sioux Indians, moving with a caution that was proof they were upon a hostile expedition.

And what could be their purpose but to injure the whites?

Dick was startled, and kept his perch, with the object of following their movements; but they had gone only a short distance when they were hidden from view by intervening rocks and trees.

He waited where he was for some time, in the hope of gaining sight of them again; but they did not reappear, and he finally came down, with the purpose of making his way back to his friend, who had sent him on this search for the deer.

Dick had no more than fairly started, when he was not a little scared by hearing the report of a gun from the direction of the Sioux invaders.

"I wonder whether that was Sam or one of the Indians," said he, stopping and listening for other sounds that might help to clear up the mystery; but none came.

He did not forget the necessity of taking heed to his own footsteps while on the way back.

Following a more circuitous route, he unexpectedly found himself confronted by a brook, which he paused to survey, while he calculated whether he could leap across.

He made up his mind that a running jump would do it, and he was about to move back for the purpose of gaining the start, when his attention was arrested by the sight of something gleaming in the water.

"What's that?" he asked himself, as he approached the stream, to examine the object more closely.

The water where it lay was only a few inches deep, and he reached down his hand and drew the stone, as it seemed to be, toward him.

As he secured it he observed two facts: it was of a bright-yellow color, and very heavy.

Besides, it was about the size of a hen's egg, and was without the slightest stain or blemish.

"I wonder what that can be?" said Dick to himself, as he turned it over in his hand, forgetting for the time the danger from the Sioux Indians.

"I declare if it isn't heavier than lead; I'll bet that its *gold!*" he added, in a whisper, as if frightened at his own thoughts. "My gracious! if it is, there's enough money in that one lump to make me rich. I must hurry to the cavern and hear what Sam has to say about it."

With the precious nugget in his possession, he started off, when he recalled the Indians that had startled him but a short time before.

"I wonder what has become of them? if they have killed Sam, it will be an awful thing, and I don't know what will become of me. Sam couldn't have thought there were any of them about, or he wouldn't have sent me off after the deer, which I didn't find."

Leaping across the brook, Dick continued on his way, watching and listening at every step.

He heard and saw nothing suspicious, and

in a comparatively short time found himself near the spot where he had seen the Indians.

Here he paused to decide what was best to do. Still failing to discover anything alarming, he resumed his cautious approach to the cavern.

This was also near at hand, and his joy was unbounded when, a moment later, he was greeted with the sight of his old friend, the trapper, who, however, looked exasperated about something that had occurred very recently.

"Oh, Sam!" called out the boy, as he rushed toward him, "have you seen anything of the Indians?"

The trapper raised his hand as a sign that he was speaking too loud.

"Yas, they've been here, and if you'll 'low me, they've raised the partickler devil."

"What do you mean?" asked the amazed Dick.

"I mean that they've took every hanged skin that war in the old place; and if you'd been thar they'd took your skin, too."

"Where were you when all this was going on?"

"Jest near 'nough to look on and enjoy it," replied the trapper, with a grim humor.

"Wasn't there any way of stopping them?"

Sam shook his head.

"Thar war too many; though, if you hadn't been along, I'd rattled 'em 'round purty lively fur awhile, anyway, and so I had to stand by and see 'em walk off with our whole winter's work."

"I heard the sound of a gun, Sam, and I was dreadfully scared, thinking it was you that was shot."

"And, instead of that, it war my old gun that war shot," said the trapper, seeming disposed to joke himself at the bad luck that had befallen him.

"Did you hit any of them?"

"I kinder think so, on account of the reason that 'bout the time I pulled the trigger I heerd something very much like a yell, and I obsarved a painted Sioux 'bout the same time of day throw up his arms and dance his death waltz."

"But where were they, that they didn't come back after you?"

"They war goin' t'other way; and the reason fur thar doin' that sort of work war this:

when I fired my gun, I war layin' as close to the cave thar as I could get; and the fools thought I war drawin' a bead onto 'em from the inside, and they knowed thar war no use of them tryin' to get thar work back onto me, so they vamoosed the ranche as fast as they knowed how; and here we are again, throwed right onto our backs, with the meanest kind of show."

"How will we have to work, Sam, to get enough money to see us through?" asked Dick, intending to keep his discovery from his good friend for a few minutes.

"The furs will be good fur two or three months yet, and if we wait that long, we'll stand a chance of scoopin' 'nough to help, but I don't s'pose you want to wait that long; and I reckon the best thing that we kin do is to make a start for Omaha. We'll be able to travel all the better without our peltries."

"Here is something that I picked up on the way here."

As he spoke, he reached out the heavy lump of which we have spoken.

Black Sam took the nugget in his hand, feeling no particular interest in it until he gained

one good look. Then Dick noticed that he started and stared at the object as though it was some valuable keepsake that had just been brought to light.

Then he carefully weighed it in his hand. This occupied but a few seconds, when he looked sharply at the boy and demanded:

"Whar did you git that!"

"I found it a little way from here, in a brook."

"Do you know what it is?"

"I *hope* it is gold."

"And that's just what it is, Dick; and, more than that, it's worth double the furs that it took us all the winter to catch. Do you hear that?"

It was very rarely indeed that the trapper allowed himself to become excited. We have shown how, in situations that were of the most trying nature, he always kept his nerves under iron-like control, but, like the bravest men, there were occasions lying in wait for him when he could no longer be his own master. The sudden discovery that he was wealthy—for such he deemed both to be—completely upset the old fellow.

"Did you hear what I said, Dick?" he demanded, in quite a loud voice, as he rose to his feet.

"Of course I heard you, and I'm glad enough to know it."

"Wall, then, why don't you slam around?"

And without waiting for the answer, he set the example.

The first movement in that direction appeared in the sudden execution of a double shuffle, in which he kept up the motion of his large feet.

When that sort of exercise exhausted him, he wound up the performance by flinging his coonskin cap high in air, and making a tremendous bound upward, accompanied by a yell that might have been heard half a mile away.

It was a curious illustration of human nature that, while the boy was as cool as a cucumber, the man old enough to be his grandfather was as wild as a lad just let out of school.

"Ain't you afraid that you'll bring the Indians back here?" asked Dick, who could not forget the danger that they had so recently escaped.

"Let 'em come," was the contemptuous re-

sponse of the trapper, who, just then, let out another shout louder than before. "Ef you knowed how much easier it is to spend money than to make it, you'd dance 'round and make a fool of yourself the same as me."

"Mebbe I'll feel like it after a while," said Dick, thinking that perhaps he was guilty in not exhibiting the boisterous enthusiasm of his friend. "But you aren't any gladder than I am."

"Did you look and see ef thar's any more of that kind of trash a-layin' round loose?" asked Sam, managing to remain quiet a moment.

"I was in such a hurry to get home to you that I didn't stop to look for any more."

"Wall, I jest bet that thar's some more of that kind of stuff whar that come from."

All at once the old fellow became thoughtful, every trace of his excitement vanishing as if by magic.

He bent his head and looked down to the ground for a full minute, like one who is seeking to recall some half-forgotten incident.

It was all clear in a moment.

He raised his head in his quick way, and said:

"Dick, do you know that I have been sartin for a half-dozen years that thar war gold 'mong the Black Hills?"

"How should I know it?" was the sensible question in return.

"Sure enough, I didn't think of that. The reason that I thought so war 'cause it was just six years ago that me and Jake Daggett war up in the Hills searching for beaver and otter-skins, and we had powerful poor luck. But one day, Jake he left me, and I s'posed that it war on 'count of his getting disgusted 'cause we didn't cotch more of the critters that we started arter. But when I met him down in St. Louey, two months arter, I seen that he had plenty money. But I s'posed he'd got it some other way than the true way. Wall, I never smelt a mice till next winter, when I met Jake and two other fellers on thar way to the Hills. When I axed 'em whar they war goin,' they said to some new beaver-runs that they had heard tell of, and they give me to understand so plain that they didn't want any company, that I didn't stay with 'em. But I had my 'spicions up, and I sort of kept 'em under my eye fur a while. They war too smart to 'low

themselves to be caught, and they give me the slip, and I didn't see nothing of 'em fur three months, when I met 'em in Omaha agin. Wall, Dick, they had piles of money, and I knowed whar they must have got it. When I thought about gold, I minded, too, that I had heard stories of its being found among these mountains years ago. Of course, it war powerful mean in Jake giving me the slip as he did, but ef the gold war thar, I had the same chance to hunt it up as he did, and I set to work. Wal, Dick, I spent week after week, pokin' and pryin' inter all the places whar it seemed to me it was possible the blamed stuff could grow. But it was no use; I couldn't cotch sight of the first speck of it, and I give it up."

"Did you ever think you had made a mistake about it!"

"Never. I knowed the gold war thar, though I couldn't set my eyes onto it, and every once in a while I'd hear something about it that would set me off agin, till I found I war neglecting my perfession, and I warn't going to make enough to buy me powder and lead. So I swore off, and went at honest work agin. Thar have been stories for years and years

'bout gold bein' in these parts, and whar you hear so much you can make up your mind that something is thar."

"It may be, Sam, that the piece that I picked up has been dropped by somebody else, and there isn't any more near it."

"That may be," replied the trapper thoughtfully. "But, anyway, we've got more than the whole winter's work in trappin' that war stole back agin, and that's enough to feel jolly over. But come, let's go and find out how it is."

The trapper seemed to have entirely recovered from his temporary enthusiasm, and as they walked thoughtfully along, he was the same sly, watchful hunter that had gone through so many perilous adventures of every sort.

He acted with as much caution as if certain that a half-dozen redskins were prowling in the vicinity.

But his supposition regarding the Sioux that had stolen the peltries seemed to be correct, for the most careful reconnoissances failed to discover the least traces of them.

"Go ahead, Dick," said Sam, "and be sure that you don't miss the spot, 'cause a good deal depends on it."

Dick had impressed the locality so fixedly in his mind, that he had little difficulty in making his way to the place.

"Here we are," said he, as they paused where he leaped the brook; "right there is where I picked up the gold."

"Show me the precise spot."

There was no trouble in doing this, Dick being able to point out the very indentation made by the precious deposit.

After he had done this, the two stood for several minutes looking up and down, as far as the eye could reach, in quest of other nuggets.

But they did not seem to be lying around loose, for nothing of the kind greeted the eye.

"I guess I found all there was," said the boy.

"It may be," replied Sam, "but thar ain't any sartainty 'bout it, 'cause gold don't grow like other crops."

Failing to detect anything by standing on the shore, the trapper now procured a large stick, with which he carefully stirred over the bottom of the brook.

There were numerous pebbles and stones of

all sizes, but none of the beauteous yellow color that had so charmed his eyes a while before. Gravel, sand, and mud were all that were encountered.

Dick was ready to give up, but not so Sam. He had lived long enough to understand the value of gold too well to allow any chance like the present to pass unimproved.

"Now, Dick, you go *down* stream, and I'll go *up*," said the trapper, "and don't be in a hurry 'bout it neither; I think thar's a good chance to scare up more of the stuff."

The boy was glad enough to assist in a search of this kind, and he started down stream as directed, while his friend moved up the current.

It was agreed that whoever made the first discovery should signal to the other by a low whistle.

They had not been separated ten minutes when the trapper was set all agog by hearing the call of the lad.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed. "I wonder whether that boy has picked up a lump the size of a punkin this time."

A few seconds were all that were required to

reach his young friend, who was excited over something.

"Wall, Dick, what is it?" asked the trapper, managing to conceal his own agitation.

"I think it's gold again," was the electric answer.

He explained that he was searching as directed, when his eye was caught by the same sort of glitter that had arrested his notice on the other occasion, and he saw a yellow lump on the corner of the large rock near them.

He stooped to pick it up, when he found that it was a part of the rock itself.

By this time the trapper had gained an idea of how the "land lay," and was attentively examining the mass of stone, which was large enough to weigh some eight or ten tons, and rested on the shore of the stream, a portion being in the water and a portion imbedded in the ground.

The result was wonderful.

A piece being chipped off, the stone was seen to be simply ore of the richest character, glittering and gleaming with the most valuable of minerals, *gold!*

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD AND BAD FORTUNE.

It would be impossible to describe Black Sam's excitement at the wonderful discovery that thousand of dollars in gold were before them.

His dances, his shouts, his wild cavortings, and his crazed conduct, must be left to the reader's imagination.

But they were so characteristic of the man, that there was something contagious in them, and before the boy was aware of it he was excited in a similar manner.

After a time, however, they recovered their self-possession, and looked upon the business more like rational beings.

There was a fortune before them, and the question was how to take possession of it.

In the first place, they had no proper tools with which to get out the precious metal.

The ore being solid, they required a pick of

some kind. Sam could think of no place where one could be procured short of Omaha, or one of the forts.

"I don't know but that we can break up our traps and make something that will do," said Sam. "But thar ain't nothin' like them 'ere things that are made on purpose."

"Can't we do enough to make us pretty well off," asked Dick, "and then come back here afterward and take away all the rest?"

"I s'pose we might, but a feller hates to leave such a pile as that when he once gets his eye onto it. He wouldn't feel very gay if he should come back, after a month or so, and find that some one had slipped down here and toted the whole thing off."

With the help of his hunting-knife, the trapper chipped off some of the rock, and it was found to be of the richest nature.

If, indeed, the whole mass should hold out as did the first specimens, then, beyond all question, there were "millions in it."

This was hardly to be expected.

When they came to chip it in other places, they learned that a good portion of the mass of stone was without a particle of gold at all.

There was nothing to cause discouragement in this fact. for, after making the most liberal allowance, there must remain enough to make both far wealthier than they had ever dreamed of becoming.

It was characteristic of the trapper that in all their conversation, from the first discovery of the good fortune, he spoke in such a way as to show that he meant the boy to become a partner with him.

It was finally agreed that they should chip off the most valuable portion they could, to such an extent as to provide a good load for the horse, and yet not attract the suspicion of any of the acquaintances Sam would be sure to meet as soon as he should get out of the wilderness and into a civilized country.

It was believed that, with the rude implements at their service, they would be able to do this in the course of three or four days.

Sam felt some uneasiness over the recent visit of the Sioux.

They were, he knew, very jealous of any intrusion upon their domain, especially when there was reason to believe that the errand was gold.

The Indians, too, appeared to have an instinctive knowledge of where the gold lay.

The trapper spent a full hour in "prospecting" the rock, by which time he had gained a pretty fair idea of its composition.

There was a corner which was as rich as it could be, some portions appearing to be almost clear metal.

This was quite soft, so that it was cut with the knife without much difficulty.

Had Sam possessed a good supply of well-tempered hunting-knives, he would have got out all the precious stuff without the aid of other implements; but that was hardly possible, and the conclusion mentioned was reached.

After the examination of the rock, Sam told Dick to stay where he was, while he went to an elevation to look for signs of Indians.

In a small valley, no more than a half-mile distant, a large camp-fire was burning.

He not only saw the smoke, but he caught the gleam of the flame itself. He counted eight Sioux in war-paint. Their ponies were cropping the grass near by. Sam knew they were not the redskins that had appropriated his

peltries, but, as they belonged to the same tribe, it was reasonable to suppose that they would soon communicate with each other, if they had not already done so.

"Where are them other varmints?" he asked himself, as he looked around for signs of them also.

It did not take long to discover the unwelcome visitors.

They were halted in a spot similar to the one containing the camp of the eight Sioux; but there was no fire under way, and, so far as he could judge, they were about to start off again.

The question now became whether the two parties would discover each other and unite.

The probabilities were altogether in favor of their doing so.

The fact that they were now separated by quite an elevated ridge did not conceal the smoke of the camp-fire of one party from the other.

"They'll come together, that's sartin," said Sam, after he had surveyed the two for a few minutes. "Thar!" he added, a moment later, "they're 'bout to jine now."

There could be no doubt of that, as the party

that had last attracted his notice started in a direct line for the camp.

They had gone but a short distance when three of their number gave utterance to a series of whoops and signals to the other party. Sam hardly heard them, when he caught the answers, emitted in precisely the same manner.

"In a few more minutes," growled Sam, "the varmints will be together, hatchin' the worst kind of deviltry." The first part of his prediction was fulfilled to the letter, and there can be little doubt that the second was also.

His visitors moved directly toward the ridge, passed over, and never stopped till the two came together.

The united redskins seemed to hold a council of war, which lasted two hours.

During all this time Black Sam scarcely removed his eyes from them.

The whole company of Sioux then started off in a northern direction.

"That's purty good," muttered the trapper, still watching their movements. "If they'll only keep that up for a day or two, it'll be the thing; but I'm afraid it won't last."

However, the entire party at last disappeared to the northward, and, so far as the eye told, Sam and Dick were left to themselves in the great wilderness.

It was now full noon, and the trapper returned to the brook where he had left the boy still chipping away.

He was not a little surprised to find that he had dislodged three or four handfuls, all of which glistened and glittered with the precious stuff.

"Ain't it gay!" exclaimed the trapper, as he caught sight of the results of the labor. "I don't know how much we've got, but it must be somewhere up 'mong the thousands."

"What!" exclaimed Dick, whose views of the business were very vague; "I didn't think it could be more than a hundred."

"Gracious, don't you know that gold is worth sumthin'?"

"If we have so much, why, let's go home."

The trapper shook his head.

"We'll have to leave a good deal as it is; but you know what the plan was that we fixed on; we're to carry all that can be done handy, and then come back and take the rest."

As Dick made no mention of dinner, Sam concluded to omit that part of the day's proceedings.

The trapper had brought in a couple of his traps, and with the separated portion he found he was able to construct an implement that was very convenient in getting out the gold, the only drawback being that it was deficient in hardness, and that, as a consequence, it soon gave out.

As the sun went down, Sam was in the highest possible spirits, for they had reaped a golden harvest indeed.

The ore taken was stowed into a bag made by binding together portions of a buffalo robe, cut in the right shape; this was covered in such a way that it could be placed upon the back of the horse and carried anywhere without attracting attention.

The fact that they had but one horse was a great inconvenience in every respect. When Dick expressed his misgivings Sam replied:

"Don't worry; when we're ready to start, thar'll be a hoss for you, and we'll go boomin' back home in as good style as we come; you can make up your mind to that."

Black Sam did not choose to tell how he meant to accomplish this, but Dick suspected that he intended to draw upon the supplies of the Sioux, some of whom were always near enough to be reached by a forced march of a day or two.

Dinner having been omitted, it was deemed best not to leave out the supper.

Accordingly, Sam took a few minutes with the line, and brought back enough fish to furnish both with a substantial meal.

This done, the trapper lit his pipe and stretched out in the front part of the cavern, as if to sleep.

But it was a long time before slumber came to the wearied hunter.

"I was happy a while ago," he muttered, giving expression to some of his imaginings, "but I don't feel so now, and I'd like to know the reason. I've got more gold than I ever dreamed 'bout, and thar ain't no reason why I shouldn't get it all safe inter Omaha; but that don't make me feel as good as I orter. I'm 'feered," continued the trapper, with a deep sigh, "that sumthin' awful is comin' down onto us, for it never fails to do

that thing when that sort of feelin' comes over me."

In a few minutes, the soft breathing of the boy showed that he was sleeping soundly.

The trapper turned, and looked back in the cavern, where the darkness was so deep that nothing at all could be distinguished.

"Sleep on, Dick," he muttered, in a low, sympathetic voice, "for I've an idea thar ain't many more such nights comin' to us; mebber I'm mistook, and I hope that I am; but I can't shake off the notion that some of the worst kind of trouble ain't fur off."

When his pipe was out, he filled it again, and as he felt no inclination to sleep, he came forth from the cavern and stood in the darkness of the outside.

The night was calm and still. There was a new moon overhead, and in accordance with an old superstition, he shuddered as he observed that he saw it over his left shoulder.

"That's another bad sign," he growled; "everything to-night is out of kilter; I never had such bad feelings that sumthin' didn't come out of it."

Making his way to the top of the hill that

he had been accustomed to use as a post of observation, he looked off over the darkened landscape.

But the night was unrelieved in every direction by any starlike twinkle of a camp-fire, and scarcely a sound reached his ear except that solemn murmur which has been defined as the voice of silence itself.

Faintly and dimly from the distance came the soft, almost inaudible roar of the water, where it was fretted by the friction against the stones and rocks in the channel, but even this seemed a part of the great overwhelming reign of solitude and silence. "Mebbe it's 'cause I've been so set up by the sight of the gold that I'm so set down now," he added, dropping into a sort of rude philosophy; "but I'll try and be ready fur whatsoever may come."

Once more he made his way back to the cavern, saying:

"I don't see the use of stayin' out here, and I don't b'lieve thar's much use of my goin' to bed; but that's just what I'm goin' to do."

And, acting upon his resolution, he shook the ashes from his pipe and walked into the cavern and lay down.

Screamer, his faithful horse, was stationed but a short distance away, and, as was the trapper's custom, he relied almost altogether upon his intelligent vigilance to apprise him of the approach of danger.

It was a long time before Black Sam could shake off the heaviness of spirits sufficiently to sink into slumber, but he succeeded at last.

Dick Stoddard was the first to awake.

The instant he was able to gather his senses, he called to Sam, who started up like one ashamed of his remissness.

"Come, Sam, we must get a few more millions and then start for home, as soon as you can buy me a horse; but I'm hungry—aren't you?"

"Wall, as I'm ginerally that way, I may say that I am; what shall it be? Can you fish agin?"

"Certainly."

"That bein' so, I'll let you do the catchin'."

"All right; where's the line?"

A few minutes later, Dick took his departure, singing to himself; for he was in the highest possible spirits at the prospect of so soon starting eastward.

He was happy over the consciousness of the wealth in their possession, more because it made Sam so delighted than on his own account; for he was too young to have anything like a realizing sense of the value of the good fortune that had befallen them.

He had become so familiar with the surroundings of the cavern that he knew just where to go to find the fish; leaving him to his task, it becomes our duty to follow Black Sam, the trapper.

The few hours' rest that Sam had secured in the later part of the night had helped in a great measure to throw off his depression.

His purpose was to make a visit to the rock, which was scarcely absent from his waking and sleeping thoughts.

He found it just as he had left it, gleaming and glittering with the very essence of richness itself.

"While the boy is cotchin' fish," he said, "I may as well cotch a few of these nuggens, first takin' a look 'round to see ef thar's any of the varmints pokin' thar noses into this business."

He visited his usual lookout stations, and made his reconnoissance as thorough as pos-

sible. "I don't see nothin' of 'em," he said to himself, as he turned to retrace his steps to the golden rock.

In a few minutes, he had succeeded in displacing a much larger quantity than he had been able to do in double the time the day before.

When he thought it was about time for the return of the boy, he ceased labor, to make his way back to the cavern.

At this moment his quick ear caught the sound of a whistle, a signal that he knew on the instant was made by an Indian, and intended for the ear of another redskin.

"The varmints have come," he muttered, as he snatched up his rifle and started to the cavern.

He moved rapidly, for his instinct told him that the danger was serious.

The call was immediately in his front, and he had hardly started when the answer came from the opposite direction, directly between him and cavern.

This was worse and worse, and the trapper instantly turned to the right with the view of passing between the two and flanking them.

Before he could take three of his quick steps, he was apprised in the same manner that an enemy was also there.

One way yet remained untried, and without as instant's halt, he wheeled and tried it, only to discover at once that that was as effectually guarded as the others.

"I'm in for it," he muttered, as he compressed his lips and started on a straight run for the cavern, knowing that he was certain to come in collision with one of his deadly enemies.

He was only fairly under way when he saw, not one, but three Sioux warriors leap up from the ground, in the attempt to shut off his return to his retreat.

But the trapper never halted nor turned; straight forward he sped, like a deer, and, when the nearest Indian threw himself directly in his path, the fugitive raised his rifle like a flash and shot him on the run.

It was the only thing to do, though the consequences were inevitable.

The instant the other Sioux saw their comrade fall, the two fired.

Sam dodged and jumped from side to side, to

distract their aim, but the distance was too short, though the aim of both was hurried.

Black Sam was struck by both bullets and badly wounded.

But with the amazing vitality of which he was the possessor, he suppressed all outcry, and continued his desperate flight for the cavern, well knowing that his only salvation was in reaching it.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE.

WOUNDED as the trapper was, it was a feat of wonderful endurance on his part, in maintaining his uprightness of body, to say nothing of his speed, which was rather increased than diminished.

The trapper had his loaded revolver still left, and he knew how to use it as well as he did his rifle.

If the Sioux held any doubt on that point, it was very speedily removed by what took place within the next few seconds.

The nigher of the two hostiles, more presumptuous than his companion, sprang directly across the path of the fugitive, with the apparent purpose of compelling him to halt.

But Sam chose not to pause in his tremendous speed; with a cry of defiance, he pointed his pistol straight at the face of the redskin, and gave him two of the chambers before he knew what was coming.

The distance separating them was slight, and a screech of sharp pain, as the Sioux halted and staggered backward, proved that the weapon had done its work well.

At this moment, the third Indian was scarcely a rod distant, and Sam turned with the intention of settling his case in the same summary manner as that of the other two; but the fellow had seen enough to convince him that the best thing he could do was to vanish with as little delay as possible, and he stood not on the order of his going, but went at once.

Ducking his head, as if he saw the deadly missile coming for him, he wheeled with extraordinary quickness, and was off like a deer.

By way of a reminder of his intentions, the trapper fired two shots at the dodging redskin, who, if wounded, was able to conceal all evidence of it, and to continue his flight with race-horse speed.

If these three Sioux had been the only ones with which Black Sam was forced to contend, he would have fought his way through very well indeed; but, unfortunately, there were others, and they speedily appeared.

Sam hadn't time to count them; for his sole

object was to reach the cavern, where he hoped to have some chance to defend himself against the bloodthirsty hostiles.

He had two barrels of his revolver undischarged, but it was no time now to use them.

The Sioux had still a chance of cutting off his escape to the cavern, but despite the great provocation he had given them, they refrained from doing so, their purpose being to visit a greater and more refined torture upon him.

The distance to the retreat was comparatively slight; but it seemed interminable to Sam, even when running with his great speed.

There was really little difference between the swiftness of pursuers and pursued, but, whatever it was, was in favor of the latter, who had every incentive to exert himself to the utmost.

The fugitive felt something like a renewal of strength when he caught sight of the open entrance to the cavern, and knew that the whole thing would be decided in the next half-dozen seconds.

At this moment there were eight or ten Indians in pursuit of the trapper, who was certainly less than a hundred yards in advance.

They did not fire, though he expected every instant to hear the crack of their rifles, and to feel the fatal pang that must bring him to the earth.

Fully two-thirds of the distance was passed over, when a gun was fired, and the fugitive distinctly felt the bullet graze the side of his face.

The report was still in his ears, when two other rifles were discharged in rapid succession.

But if the fates had been cruel to the trapper heretofore, they were now more lenient, and the missiles went wide of their mark.

"It is do or die!" muttered the sorely-pressed fugitive, as he made strides which can be likened to nothing but the tremendous leaps of the kangaroo.

By this time the Sioux could not help seeing that the only possible way of preventing their prey from reaching the cavern was to shoot him down.

The shots came like hailstones, and, as if they expected to paralyze him with terror, they gave utterance to their frightful yells.

They did not diminish his speed in the least, and they failed to increase it.

Sam was going at a rate which he himself could not sustain for five minutes, even with his life at stake.

Bang, bang, bang! went the guns.

Whoop, yell, screech, went the throats of the maddened Sioux.

But in spite of their most desperate efforts to bring him down, he reached the goal.

As he saw the opening before him, he stooped, without decreasing his speed, and in he plunged, like a diver going into the water.

He was greeted with a scattering volley as he vanished.

But his good fortune did not desert him now, and he went under cover almost unscathed.

The instant he knew the solid wall of rock was between him and his enemies, he dropped upon his knees, and began reloading his gun with the most astonishing rapidity—a rapidity acquired by long years of practice and the deadly necessity of the case.

“Now, come in who dare!” he growled between his set teeth, as he shoved the rifle forward, ready to receive his visitors.

Whether they heard the challenge or not, they virtually accepted it.

The long, gleaming barrel was scarcely thrust forward, when a painted warrior appeared at the entrance.

Stooping, he attempted to follow the lion to his lair.

He had no sooner shown himself, than the front of the cavern was filled with the smoke of the weapon, and the report and death-yell mingled together.

The Indian was instantly seized by the legs, and drawn back by one of his comrades.

Any one would have supposed that such a reception would check the pursuers most effectually.

But the Sioux resolved to rush in and overwhelm him before he could reload.

One important matter, however, slipped their recollection, and that was that he had still a couple of bullets left in his revolver.

They were soon reminded of their forgetfulness by the crack of the weapon almost in their faces, the ball taking effect, and promptly checking their advance.

"They'll soon be here again," was the conclusion of Sam, as he began reloading his piece.

He thus gained time to prepare his rifle and fill the empty chambers of his revolver.

Though listening carefully, he was unable to hear the slightest noise that indicated the presence of the redskins outside.

But he was not thrown off his guard by this tomb-like silence.

His next proceeding was to roll over a huge stone lying at the mouth of the cavern, to prevent ingress of any one.

This large stone he had kept in place for years, so as to use in an emergency like the present.

More than once it had served the purpose of keeping out the bullets of the red rovers of the wilderness, whose leaden missiles rattled against it like rain.

The boulder was so poised that no great strength was required to place it in position.

But at the moment of doing so the hunter was reminded of his wounds by a stinging pain, so severe as to force an exclamation from him.

Still, he gave it no further attention, until the passing of several minutes in perfect silence convinced him that he was likely to have some time to himself.

"I reckon that I'd better dig in around these 'ere roots," he muttered, as he proceeded to ascertain the extent of his hurts.

It looked as if they were of a serious character, one being in the side and the other in the thigh.

In the former, the bullet had passed clean through and gone.

But, beyond question, the ball was still in the thigh, and the trapper could see no way of extracting it.

"That's the ticket that's going to make some trouble," he said to himself, after making a thorough examination. "Thar's a little pill in thar that ain't going to be in a hurry to come out, and I won't be able to dance the Virginny break-down in my usual style as long as it's with me."

His present duty was to keep his enemies off till night, when he might hope for some chance to give them the slip.

His thoughts next turned to Dick Stoddard.

He could not but feel that the situation was disheartening in the extreme.

"The chap has heerd the guns and the yells, and ef thar's anybody within a dozen miles,

they've heerd 'em, too, for they let 'em out in thar best style. That boy is mighty smart. When he heerd them yells and the shootin', he's knowed what they all meant; tharfore, what did he do? That's what I'd like to know."

The trapper had been with Dick long enough to have great faith in his sagacity.

He believed that if there was any way possible for him to get out of the difficulty, he was the one to do it; but the trouble was that he could see very little "show" for him.

"He can keep himself hid for a time," he said, as he thought the thing over, "but I can't see that it can do him any good; for he's got ter get out and move round, as he can't stay thar forever, and when he does come out, what's he to do? If he had a hoss, thar might be a little chance, but he hain't got that even—so he's in a tight fix any way."

Sam at last reached the conclusion that Dick was certain to fall into the hands of the hostiles, while as to himself, the chance was that he must succumb to the exhaustion of his wounds, unless he should secure assistance very speedily, and there was little prospect of that.

He would have been glad to give up all the

gold and more, too, if thereby he could assist the boy; but this was out of the question.

All that the trapper could do was to wait for night, and in the mean time hold off his enemies.

So long as he remained quiet he was scarcely conscious of pain; but when he moved, the suffering was intense.

"It wouldn't do for me to run another race with the varmints, for I'd kerflop at the first step."

Noon came and passed, and still he saw and heard nothing of the Sioux, though he was certain they were near at hand.

The afternoon was about half gone, when a slight noise at the opening set his nerves jumping.

"The varmints are thar," he whispered, as he crept a few feet forward, so as to listen.

The sound which reached the ears of the fugitive was such as is made by a body moving over the ground with extreme caution.

Black Sam believed that it was the noise of an Indian crawling stealthily toward the cavern; and he was willing to meet his visitor half-way.

It may have been that the Sioux was as quick-eared as the white man; for the latter had scarcely begun his advance, when the noise of the redskin's approach ceased.

Both suspected the other, and, like a couple of trained pugilists, each waited for his enemy to "lead off." But Black Sam could not be drawn into exposing himself to a shot from the outside. There could be no doubt that the redskins had kept the mouth of the cavern covered with their rifles ever since he had plunged into it; and the instant he showed his head, he would catch it from a dozen different directions.

There could exist no stronger reason, therefore, for keeping his head out of sight so long as this state of things lasted, which is precisely what the trapper did.

As he expected to have his hands more than full, he made what preparation he could for it.

First, he forced himself to eat a goodly meal of the pemmican.

He suffered not a little from thirst, his wounds causing him some fever; and, though he ran considerable risk, he stealthily left his

post, and helped himself to a good draught of water from the little stream.

As his thirst increased, he did the same thing two or three times during the afternoon.

The iron will of the old hunter enabled him to keep down a growing weakness that would have forced an ordinary man to succumb.

He had already laid his plans, and was only waiting for night to carry them into execution.

At such a time the hours pass slowly, and it was weariness indeed before the day ended; but it expired at last, and as soon as it was fairly dark he made ready to go.

He believed they would wait until early midnight before attempting anything further against him.

It was no more than fairly dark when the trapper moved cautiously back through the rear of the cavern, until he reached the narrow passage visited by him and Dick.

Along this he crept in the same guarded manner, pausing at the tiny stream to quench his thirst.

There was much suffering from his hurts, which were continually growing worse; but he did not permit the pain to retard his progress.

He had his gold with him, for he intended to run no risk of its falling into the hands of his enemies.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, or thereabouts, the rear opening of the cavern was reached.

If the Sioux had discovered this means of escape, his doom was sealed.

After a little careful reconnoitring he was satisfied the way was open.

A few minutes later, his long, crouching form moved carefully along the rocks, hugging the shadows, and gliding as silently as a phantom.

It was not long before he had passed a distance that assured him he was safe from all molestation of the Indians, so long as he used the most ordinary caution.

Now came the time for a new departure, for it was impossible to proceed further without his horse, and he was somewhat doubtful about his ability to secure him.

But for the disabling wounds, the hunter would have asked no better sport than to play back a trick or two upon the redskins, and, besides picking out their best steed, stampede the rest.

But all he asked now was the chance to get away.

Softly he whistled to the faithful creature, certain that, if he heard it, he would respond on the instant.

But he feared that some of the prowling Indians would recognize the call.

Good fortune attended the poor fellow again; for it so happened that his horse at that very moment was less than a hundred feet off.

The signal was hardly uttered, when the delighted trapper heard the sound of his hoofs, and, in the dim moonlight, descried the beast coming toward him.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DESPAIR.

WHEN Black Sam found himself astride of his steed, with his gold intact, he felt a marked revival of spirits.

There was a post known as Fort Adams lying in a southwest direction, and which he was hopeful of reaching, by sharp riding, in two days.

Accordingly, he headed in that direction, and as soon as it was safe, struck Screamer into a rapid gallop.

This rate, however, could be maintained only at rare times, on account of the broken and rough nature of the ground.

The wounds, in the course of an hour or two, began to trouble him again.

When morning dawned, although he had made good progress, yet he was in a pitiable condition.

He had a burning fever, his head was dizzy, and there were signs of delirium coming over

him that the trapper believed would in the course of a few hours be violent.

He resolved, therefore, while he was master of himself, to take care of the gold.

The best way to do this was by *caching* it, as it is termed, which simply means to bury it in some spot where no one but him who thus hides can afterward find it.

As he had no means for digging, he sought out a place among the rocks, which were so abundant that little time was required to find what he wanted.

When this was done, he hurriedly stowed away the buffalo bag containing the precious stuff, and then fixing the spot and its surroundings in his mind, he remounted his horse and resumed his journey toward Fort Adams.

The sun was up, but he felt no hunger.

On the contrary, the same raging thirst burned in his system, and he often paused to drink.

But his dizziness steadily grew worse until it was all he could do to prevent himself from falling from his horse.

He shut his eyes, leaving the animal to himself.

But the moment he did so, it seemed as if his head were being lifted straight up from his body, and he opened his eyes again with a feeling of terror, such as comes over the strongest man at the sudden discovery that some great calamity is swooping down upon him.

Strange fancies now began to appear, and he heard a peculiar humming.

Then, too, when his eyes were wide open, the oddest sort of shapes and figures kept going and coming, flickering and brightening, floating at times high above his head, and then in his very face.

He saw the forms of his associates of long years before, riding and walking at his side.

Some of these were men that had died years previous—many had been shot while engaged with him in the perilous pursuit of the beavers and otters.

Others had died at some fort, or in the cities to which they had made occasional pilgrimages, to spend their hard earnings too often in riotous living.

Matters got worse and worse.

The medley of sounds became more and more bewildering every minute; there was a con-

stant buzzing and humming in his ears, and the flights of utter bewilderment grew more frequent and lasted longer.

It seemed to the trapper that his senses were flickering, as it may be said, ready to depart, and yet held by the struggles of nature, which would not let them go.

But the time came when they went.

Black Sam was riding along in a slow, solemn fashion, leaving everything to his horse, when all at once he felt himself falling to the ground.

He made a wild, vague effort to save himself, but could not; he remembered striking the earth, when all became blank darkness—utter unconsciousness!

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When the trapper recovered his senses, he was lying on some buffalo-robes before a small camp-fire.

Turning his head, as he thus lay, he noticed that there was a sort of roof over his head, though it was evidently made more to keep the wind off than anything else.

The fire itself was built against a rock, that rose to a height of a dozen feet or so.

Projecting from the top of this rock were

several branches of trees, that reached three or four yards away.

These were spread over with other branches at right angles, forming quite an effective covering.

Sam was conscious of his weakness, but his head was remarkably clear.

He cautiously raised himself on his elbow, and tried to look around, so as to learn more of his surroundings; but was not able to accomplish much.

He saw from the gathering gloom that night was closing in upon him; but he gained enough to learn he was resting in a sort of gully or ravine, where it was not likely that the small camp-fire would be observed.

He was pretty well walled in on every hand—so well indeed that the brief survey which he took satisfied him that the camping business had been looked after by some one who understood it.

Who was the person?

This was the question that came to the bewildered trapper almost at the same instant that he regained control of his senses.

He was, he now saw, entirely alone.

With some difficulty he gained his feet, but he had no sooner assumed the upright position, than he was compelled to change it for a recumbent one.

He had not the strength of a child; and had he not come down as he did, he would have dropped in a fainting condition.

"Wall, by gracious!" he exclaimed; "but it's queer that I can't see something 'round here that can give me some idea of how the matter stands."

But Sam had a good pair of eyes, and he used them to the best of his ability.

There were signs showing that there had been many meals eaten in this camp, of which there could be no doubt that the weak hunter had had his due share.

"Ef I'm in the hands of a party of them varmints," he muttered, as he continued the scrutiny, "they're just nussin' me up till I get well enough to enjoy thar way of cookin' a prisoner; and if that are the way of the biz, why, I rather guess it'll be a little while longer afore he gits as well as they want him to."

He was speculating as to how he would

"play 'possum," when he was reminded of his peril by the sound of some one approaching.

No pen can describe his relief when, as the figure emerged from the wood, and came into the narrow circle of light thrown out by the small camp-fire, he was seen to be a white man, about his own size, and attired in a dress which showed he belonged to the same profession.

More than that, the second keen look that Sam indulged in enabled him to identify the individual as an old acquaintance named Tom MacGill, with whom he had hunted and trapped many years before.

He remembered him as a brave and generous fellow, who, as is often the case with such, was noted for his perpetual ill-luck. Of course, MacGill knew nothing of Sam's recovery of reason during his temporary absence.

MacGill had been off on a little hunting expedition, for he bore a haunch of venison upon his shoulder, while he carried his rifle in one hand.

Throwing the meat upon the ground, he took a seat on a large stone, and began preparing it for supper.

He occasionally looked at Black Sam, who was lying on the ground, gazing at him in turn, although neither spoke a word.

Only a few minutes were needed to prepare the venison for the fire, when Tom raked out a lot of coals, and spread a number of thin slices on it.

As the game crisped and smoked over the hot embers, the odor reached the nostrils of the patient, and awakened something of his old appetite.

"Wall, Tom," said Sam, "hurry up and give a feller a few pounds of that; thar's a holler inside of me that you might chuck a whole deer in, with a buffalo thrown in to fill the corners."

The trapper addressed stared as if some one had struck him. The expression of amazement and wonder was so marked that Black Sam laughed heartily at him.

Noticing this, MacGill asked, in a low, scared voice:

"Do you know what you're 'bout, Sam?"

"Wal, I reckon I do, Tom. S'pose you give me your hand on it, old pard?"

And the two shook hands in the warmest and most cordial manner.

"When you axed about eating," said MacGill, "that sounded like old times, and I begin to think you war climbin' the hill agin."

"Yas," replied Sam, with a pleased look. "While you war off it all come back agin just as clear as noonday, and I war trying to figure out how the whole blamed thing war, when you come poking back with that venison on your shoulder, which 'minds me that it is time that I took a bite," whereupon the speaker proceeded to help himself to the savory food.

"Easy now, Sam," cautioned his friend. "You know that you've been sick a good while, and it ain't the best thing for you to cram yourself to death."

It was Sam's turn to look astonished, and staring straight into the face of his comrade, he asked:

"How long have I been sick?"

"Just guess," replied Tom. "I'd like to see how near you'll come it."

"I hain't any more idea than a baby," said Sam. "But on gin'ral principles, I should say it was two or three days." MacGill laughed.

"What a fool a man can be without half trying, as you've just showed! For instead of

being two or three days, it is all of two weeks, and a day or two over!"

"Now Tom, ef it warn't you, I'd say it war the biggest lie that I've heered in a year. But tell me all about it, for I'll be hanged if I can remember anything at all."

"What's the last thing you can recollect?"

"I call to mind that I tumbled from my horse to the ground—whar is Screamer?" abruptly asked Sam, as his own words recalled the memory of his faithful steed.

"He's all right," was the reassuring reply, "and if it hadn't been for that same animile, you'd bid under and passed in your checks long ago."

"Wall, I'm waitin' for you to tell me the whole story."

"It won't take long to do that. As I war sayin', it war a little over a fortnight ago that I war upon Roarin' Creek——"

"How fur is that from here?" interrupted Sam.

"It ain't six miles."

"All right," responded the wounded man, "now I've got my bearin's and you can go ahead, and I won't bother you agin."

"Wall, as I war sayin', I war up on Roarin' Creek a couple of weeks ago; though for that matter, I war thar all winter, on the hunt for beavers and other critters."

"How did you make out?" ventured Sam, once more.

"You know how I ginerally do," replied Tom, with a significant smile. "You remember, don't you?"

"That warn't very well, if I call to mind the way it war."

"You've hit it agin, Sam; in the whole season I took jest eight beavers, and I war gettin' ready to go home, sorter disgusted like, when what should I see but your animile, that walked right up to me with a whinny as though he knew me, which I sp'ose he did; 'cause he met me down in Omaha last summer, that time you and me went on that spree, and I hadn't looked at him twice afore I knowed him too. Wall, that critter bit my arm in such a way that, not seein' you either, made me sartin that something war wrong with you; so I started arter the critter."

"How far did he lead you?"

"All of a half a mile, and the wonder war

how he ever found me; for the whole distance war over the roughest kind of ground that you ever sot eyes onto. However he found me and led me back to whar you war dancin' over the ground as crazy as a bedbug. If I hadn't many peltries on hand, I had a purty good stock of whisky, and I shoved a lot of that down your throat. Wall, you got sorter docile like and I hadn't much trouble to get you to go 'long with me. I lifted you up onto Screamer, that seemed to know what the matter war and tried to help all he could. When I got you back to this place, me a steadyin' you on your critter all the way, you wanted to go to sleep. Wall, I seed you war in a purty bad way and I took a good look at your hurts. If I ain't much on cotchin' beavers, I know something 'bout docterin' sick folks, for I've had a good deal of it to do; and I took you in hand at once. I seed thar war a ball in your thigh that would have to come out afore you could get well, and I went to huntin' for it. It war a hard job, and I expected to have a hard time, as I had nothin' but my knife, and you kept out of your head; but, somehow or other, you war as docile as a skulped Injin:

and, though it hurt you so much that you let out a groan now and then, yet you didn't give me any trouble at all, and, at last, I fotched it. That, you know, war the best thing that could be done; though you war so weak that I was afeard you would slide under. You war mighty sick for a while and needed purty good watch-in' and nussin', which war what I tried to do the best I knew how. Once or twice I thought to try and start fur Fort Adams with you; but I war afeard you wouldn't be able to stand it, and I kept you right here all the time."

"Didn't the redskins trouble you any?"

"Never a once; thar's been plenty of 'em in the neighborhood, but they haven't come too close. I've got a purty good hidin' place here, and you warn't in any danger at any time from the Sioux."

"And I've just stayed here all the time?"

"That's the idea exactly; you hadn't the strength of a mouse, and all you done war to lay on the ground and look at me and never say nothin' to nobody. You didn't make me no trouble, by which anybody would 've knowed you war out of your right mind, 'cause you're such a contrary cuss when you're all right."

“Wall, Tom, I’ll pay you for this.”

The other trapper turned upon him.

“I’d like to know what you mean by that, Sam.”

His patient laughed as he answered:

“Now, you needn’t get huffy, old pard; for my idea ain’t to just to haul out a pile of stamps to hand over to you, ’cause if I did I ain’t the chap that carries that sort of thing ’bout me. But you know that you’re a mighty onlucky cuss, and s’posin’ that I should show you a way that you could rake in a good deal more than you’ve done in all the last ten years, would you get your back up ’bout that?”

“Wall, that’s a different thing from what I thought you meant. When you come at me on that side, I’ll lean over and listen to it all.”

“That’s just what I mean and nothin’ else. But, to put it another way, I want to hire you.”

MacGill’s face showed that he did not understand his old friend.

Thereupon, Black Sam proceeded to tell the story of little Dick Stoddard.

Tom MacGill possessed more education than is generally seen among his class, and he

listened with the deepest interest to his comrade.

"I can't ever sleep agin," added Sam, "if I don't do all I can to get the little chap away from the Sioux, and I do it for the love I bear him."

"So you mean to go on a hunt for him. Wall, the way you're gettin' along you'll soon be able to start. You can go kinder slow at first, and by the time you get up 'mong the huntin'-grounds you'll be yourself agin."

"Yes, and afore that, too. That's all right; but I want you to go with me."

"Of course I'll do it, being as the trappin' season is over."

"The only way you can go with me is for me to hire you out."

"Then I don't go, that's all," was the blunt reply.

"Wall, I see a way of puttin' it in a better shape than that," said Sam, as an idea struck him. "Old pard, you and me have allers been good friends, though I don't know as we've done a great deal of trampin' together; but you've just done me a turn that amounts to somethin'. Of course I'd done the same thing

for you or anybody else. But that don't make it any different. You've done it, and I've got a chance to do something for you."

"Wall, if it's all right, why, it's all right; let's hear what it is."

"You know, 'Tom, that you and me have heard of a good deal of gold up 'mong the Black Hills; have you ever *found* any?"

"Not the first sight, though I've heard of plenty that have; it wouldn't be my luck to stumble over it."

"Wall, your luck has come at last; I know where thar's enough of the yaller stuff to make you and me rich; thar's no humbug in it either. If you'll go with me on a hunt for the boy, I'll show you whar it is, and help you to it. Will you go?"

"I *will*!"

And so the compact was sealed.

CHAPTER XV.

HUNTING WITHOUT A CLEW.

SAM was still so weak from his wounds that he was unable to stand all that would be required of him; but he possessed an iron will, as we have already shown, and he resolved that he would go at once or die on the way.

Tom would have preferred to wait a day or more before starting, but he knew it was useless to talk delay to his comrade.

Both agreed that the marauding party that had taken the boy was to the north of them, which conclusion was reached, as it may be said, upon general principles.

On the morning succeeding the return of Black Sam's reason, the two mounted their horses and started in search of Dick Stoddard.

It would have been hard to tell which was the more delighted—the horse Screamer or his owner.

The meeting between them was quite touch-

ing, resembling that of two long-separated brothers.

Once again on the back of his steed, breathing the clear mountain air, Sam rapidly regained health and strength.

The air was charming, and, despite the rugged route, they encamped all of twenty miles to the north of where they had spent the last few weeks together.

Sam was certainly much better, so much so indeed that he was willing to own that, at the time of starting in the morning, he felt so weak that he feared more than once he would have to give up.

They saw several parties of Sioux, and a long distance off observed a company of a dozen Blackfeet.

MacGill carried a small spy-glass, which proved to be of much assistance.

Taking advantage of every available lookout, they climbed patiently to the top, and surveyed the great expanse of country stretched out before them, with as sharp scrutiny as if their lives depended upon their detecting some sign of their enemies.

Just as the sun was setting they made their

way to the crest of the highest elevation that they had yet ascended, and the manner in which they gazed directly northward proved they had discovered something of unusual interest.

They exchanged the glass several times, and not until the sun sank behind the mountains in the west, and darkness closed in upon the scene, did they put away the instrument and look in each other's faces.

"Wall, Tom, what do you make of it?" asked Sam.

"What do I make of it?" repeated his companion—"what could I make of it but a village of the varmints!"

"How many do you calc'late is thar?"

"Wall, that ain't so easy to tell, for we didn't have much light on the place when we got the first view. We'll tell better to-morrer arter sun-up. But, Sam, thar's the place whar we must make a call as soon as we can strike the spot."

"You're right. It would be a good stroke of luck if we should happen to hit the little feller at the first lick."

"Yes. The thing mought happen, and it moughtn't. We'll see to-morrow."

As the darkness deepened, they retired to a

secluded place, where they were sure of being hid from sight, and started a fire.

They were in such an elevated region that the atmosphere had a tinge of winter's severity, and beside the warm fire they found their heavy blankets almost indispensable.

It was the practice of the two hunters to bring down what game they needed as they were journeying through the day, so that when night came all they had to do was simply to cook it.

In this way they kept themselves supplied without any delay.

This practice was not without its disadvantages, for on one occasion, just as MacGill had raised his gun to fire at his game, somebody else fired and killed it, and he made the discovery that they were close to a large hunting party of Indians.

No little care was required to avoid a conflict with them, and having gotten safely away, the greatest caution was necessary to prevent a meeting.

All this was proof that they were in the heart of the Indian country, and liable to meet their enemies at any time.

At the earliest "streakings of dawn" the two were at the lookout.

The survey was anything but satisfactory.

The conclusion was that the village was a collection of some fifty or more lodges.

As that was a pretty fair dimension for a "town" in this part of the world, it was agreed that it should be visited at once.

But while they were discussing it, Black Sam made the interesting discovery that there was still another village to the northwest that had escaped their notice.

But it was really some miles nearer than the one which they had been studying so long.

"It won't do to give that the go-by," said Sam; "an' the only way to manage it will be for you to take one and me the other. What do you say to it, Tom?"

"I'm agreeable. Which'll you take?"

"It don't make any difference to me. I'll try the one off to the left."

This was a wise proceeding, as each man was so skilled that he was as capable of pursuing the search alone as with another.

By separating as proposed, when the work gave them the opportunity, they placed them-

selves in a situation to do just twice as much as if they went together.

The proposition of Sam was acted upon with the promptness that these veterans always showed.

Their plan of action was very simple.

They were to go at once upon their respective errands, and not return until each had made his reconnoissance so complete that there was no room for any mistake in the conclusions reached.

A prominent elevated rock of a peculiar shape, placed some six or eight miles ahead, was agreed upon as the rendezvous where they were to meet in the evening, and report, provided the work could be completed in that time.

If either or both should find the task incomplete, he would not leave the ground.

And so Black Sam rode northwest, and Tom MacGill due north.

Although Sam had a shorter distance to go than Tom, yet he was well convinced that it would require more time, on account of the greater difficulties in the way.

When noon came, he had not reached a point more than half-way to his destination, and he

made up his mind that it would be out of the question for him to attain the place where he and his friend were to reunite.

"It don't make any difference," he muttered. "Tom 'll know whar I am, if he gets back first, which ain't sartin to happen anyway."

The latter part of the journey was much less difficult than the first, so that, when the afternoon drew to a close, the trapper found himself so close to the Indian village, that he concluded to dispense with his horse and go it alone.

Screamer could be trusted to himself, for it was certain that, whenever he took his master upon a scout of this kind, he comprehended all his responsibilities.

Accordingly, his owner simply turned him loose, and went upon his own business.

The first noticeable fact that struck the trapper was that most of the warriors were absent from the village.

This was favorable to the success of the hunter's purpose, as he was less likely to encounter difficulty in learning whether the boy was there or not.

In case Dick Stoddard was with this branch

of the Sioux, Sam was confident of his power to recapture him without much difficulty.

Removed so far from the frontier posts, the red men were not in the habit of guarding against stealthy attempts at rescue, for the reason that they were extremely rare.

And, whenever the attempts were made, they were almost always in the interest of women, or girl captives.

A bold effort at night, when conducted by such an old hand as Sam, was very likely to succeed.

It was scarcely dark when the trapper cautiously placed himself as close to the village as was safe, and began to test whether the boy whom he was seeking was there or not.

He made a complete circuit of the place, bringing himself so near in two or three instances that he narrowly escaped detection.

There were plenty of squaws and children, and he also observed a number of warriors and more old men.

But the form that he valued more than all these together was not to be seen, nor could he discover any signs of Dick.

This was not positive proof that the boy was not there.

It was possible that he was sick and confined to his lodge, though Sam did not believe it.

It was more likely that he was shut up as a prisoner.

The trapper next determined to try a plan as original as it promised to be effective.

While he was engaged in his reconnoissance, he saw more than one squaw going to and fro with some utensil in which water was carried.

His plan was to arrest one of these, and extort the information he needed.

In accordance with his scheme, Black Sam stationed himself near the stream, at a point where the water-carriers were in the habit of obtaining their supply, secreting himself so that he was secure against observation.

He was not compelled to wait long.

In fact, he was no more than fairly in position, when he descried a woman coming directly toward him. The old woman was thinking of everything else but a call from a man of another race.

As she drew near the stream, Sam actually

heard her humming some sort of an Indian doggerel to herself.

She was permitted to stoop down and fill her utensil without her ditty being interfered with.

But as she straightened up, and turned around to retrace her steps, she found herself confronted by a terrible figure—that of a tall, gaunt man, in the garb of a white hunter.

With a gasp, she dropped the pail, and was on the point of turning to flee, when the trapper seized her arm, and said, in a low but ominous voice, in her own language:

“If my red-face sister speaks loud or runs away before I tell her she may go, I will kill her. Let her do as I tell her, and all shall be well.”

The woman made a desperate attempt to call out for help.

But Sam, expecting this, grasped her by the throat, half-choking her to death.

At the same time, he dragged her by main force some two or three rods to one side.

When the squaw was at the last gasp Sam let up, and waited for her to recover.

This took several seconds, and the first use

she made of her returning strength was to attempt another yell.

But the captor was as ready as ever, and he squelched it before it rose to the dignity of a yawp, and scarcely a gurgle.

"My red sister can't do that more than once again, when I'll choke her so that she'll go to the happy hunting-grounds of the departed warriors as quick as greased lightning."

By this time it began to creep into the head of the woman that her life depended upon her keeping quiet; and she contented herself with a few swallows and gasps, until she was sure that the power of breathing had not departed, when she stood dumb and awaiting his orders.

"Will my beloved sister keep still, and answer the questions that I ask her?"

"I will tell my brother what he wants to know."

"The Sioux have a younger brother of mine with them; they took him less than a moon ago. I've come for him. I want my sister to tell me where he is; which lodge is he in?"

"There is no white boy with us," she answered; "the warriors are off on a hunt, and they may bring him back with them."

"When did they start on their hunt?"

"Before the sun rose this morning."

"If my sister tells me things that are not so, then I will kill her."

"I do not speak with a double tongue; I tell him the truth; nothing else shall I say."

Llack Sam believed her. She held him in such terror that she dared not speak in any other way than truthfully. Besides that, if the boy was really in the custody of her tribe, he had spoken so that she must have believed that he knew it.

The squaw was so bewildered, that she failed to comprehend the permission given her, and it was not until the trapper set the example by turning about and walking away, that she began to suspect she was free to do the same.

Then she started with the suddenness of a shot.

Sam was still walking in the direction of his horse, and had not taken more than a dozen steps, when he heard her shrill scream ring out, repeating itself with an ever-increasing vigor and power.

"Sing away," he muttered, as he increased his steps, "and see what good it'll do you."

However, he did not tarry. His long strides carried him rapidly forward through the wood, and when he had gone a little farther he paused and gave utterance to the well-known signal which he was sure would bring the animal.

A minute later he rode off on his horse, heading toward the rock that had been agreed upon as the rendezvous.

The distance was so great that, after several miles' ride, he lay by until morning, when he resumed his journey.

On reaching the spot, a few minutes satisfied him that Tom MacGill had not been there.

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK AND FORTH AND BACK AGAIN.

WHEN two days came and went without anything being seen of Tom, Sam began to feel uneasy.

However, his suspense ended the third day.

It was near the middle of the afternoon, and the trapper was lying full length on the top of the rock, looking off over the miles of mountain, stream, prairie, and ravine, and speculating with himself as to the time that he could afford to spend in this fashion.

He glanced from one village to another, the two being dim and faintly defined in the distance, while here and there he was able to catch a glimpse of some of the warriors moving in different directions across the country.

Probably he had gazed off toward the more distant town full a hundred times, and he turned his eyes once more in a listless way, when he observed a horseman crossing a nar-

row, open space, not more than a quarter of a mile off.

Bending his keen gaze upon him, he was immensely relieved to see that it was MacGill at last.

The fellow continued approaching at a very leisurely gait, now hid from view by the intervening trees and rocks, and finally appearing under the very edge of the immense mass of stone, from which Sam had descended to meet him.

The two grasped hands and greeted each other warmly, for they were rejoiced to meet after their separation.

"Wall, Sam, you haven't got the boy with you, I see."

"No; I haven't seed hide or hair of him since I went off on a fool's errand. And I don't s'pose you've done much better."

"Not a bit; the worst of it was that I thought I was on the trail and slammed 'bout for two days sartin that I'd fetch him back with me, and you see how I come."

Black Sam explained what he had done since their separation, and then asked Tom to tell how he had conducted his end of the line.

“Wall, it won’t take me long to do that,” said the hunter, with a sigh of disgust. “I reached the village ’bout noon, and jest as I was drawin’ nigh, I seed a party startin’ off. That warn’t nothin’ very wonderful, but while I was watchin’ ’em from the top of a hill, I thought I seed a white boy with ’em. I grabbed for my glass, but you may shoot me if I hadn’t lost it. But I took another squint, and that satisfied me that the boy I wanted was thar sure ’nough. Wall, that was a company goin’ off on a buffalo hunt toward the north, and all I could do was to foller, and wait for my chance to snatch him. Mebbe you know that it ain’t the easiest thing in the world to do, and it took some of the tallest kind of dodgin’ and diggin’ to save me from buckin’ aginst ’em! Thar was so much of that sort of thing, you see, that it was a good while afore I could make out to get near ’nough to gain a squar look at the younker, and when I done so what do you s’pose it was? why it was nothin’ but a young redskin—a chief I s’pose—they was takin’ out for a duckin’ in the way of the hunt or war-path. Wall, I took one good squint at him, and that was all I wanted. I hung my

tail atween my legs, didn't say nothin' to nobody, and come straight back agin over my own trail, till I got to the village up yonder, whar I stopped long 'nough to make sartin he warn't thar, when I come on back, and here I am."

And so the result of their more than three days' labor was a failure.

Where was Dick Stoddard likely to be?

Where among all the different branches of the Sioux was it probable that he was held in durance?

What was the next step to be taken?

There were Sioux to the right of them, to the left of them, behind and in front of them.

They were in the middle of the Indian country, and in whatsoever direction they turned, they were sure of encountering them.

All this being so, the question remained as to whither they should turn to hunt for the stolen boy.

The two sat down under the shadow of the rock, and as they smoked their pipes, discussed the situation.

The case being as it was, it was agreed that the probabilities of success were just doubled

by their separating and pursuing their search independently of each other.

Even then it can be seen that a great deal depended on good fortune.

If they should happen to go wrong each time, or should conduct their undertaking in such a way that their business became generally known, and the Sioux thus warned, the difficulties were immeasurably increased.

The latter contingency was hardly likely to occur in the case of two such experienced hunters as Tom and Sam.

Both were well convinced that the life of Dick was in no danger from the hostiles.

There was still a possibility that the boy, hearing the guns and shouts of the Sioux at the time of their attack upon Black Sam, had secreted himself, and kept out of their way.

He might have managed to do this for a few days, but since he had no horse, it could not have continued long.

So both agreed that he was alive and in the hands of the Sioux.

"Wall," said Black Sam, when the night was close at hand, "I don't see as we can do but one thing, and you know what that is."

"All right. Go ahead and finish it."

The trapper Sam drew forth his hunting-knife, and took the keen point between his fingers, holding it thus suspended for a moment

Looking at his companion, he said:

"The first is fur you and the second for me."

MacGill nodded to signify that he assented, whereupon he who held the knife gave it a dexterous flit in the air.

As it dropped to the ground, it fell in such a way that the point was turned to the northwest.

Sam allowed it to remain for a moment, so that his friend might make no mistake about it.

"It's all right," said Tom, in a low voice. "Now, let's see what you make it. Up with her."

The same manœuvre was repeated as before, and the weapon fell with the point lying to the northeast. The two hunters laughed when they saw this.

In brief, the meaning was that, in prosecuting the search for the lost boy, MacGill was to travel in a northwest direction, while Sam was to journey toward the northeast.

The programme that we have given was carried out as soon as the morning broke, and the buffalo steak was swallowed.

One trapper headed his horse toward the northwest, and the other in a northeast direction, and, waving each other a cheery good-by, they were soon lost to view, each intent upon his own duty.

Difficult as was the road, Black Sam kept Screamer's head toward the northeast, while his friends diverged to the northwest with as much exactness and fidelity.

At the close of the second day, Sam was caught in a tremendous storm that forced him into shelter.

It was one of those terrific flurries of the elements, such as are sometimes met with in the west, and which come up with the suddenness of the tropical storms in the low latitudes.

This interference proved more serious than would have been supposed, for it so obstructed many of the ravines and paths which Sam attempted to follow, that he found himself on more than one occasion brought to a full stop, and compelled to make long detours. On the third morning, he struck an Indian village,

which required two full days' examination before he was satisfied.

The reason for this was the discovery that there were two prisoners in the hands of the red men.

They seemed to be a man and his wife.

It was his wish to help the two out of captivity, and had there been only the man, he might have succeeded; but, in moving about, he was unfortunate enough to be discovered, and it was all he could do to get himself out of what threatened to be a bad scrape.

Still hopeful, the trapper pushed on in the same general direction, and, within a few hours, came upon another settlement of hostiles, of about the same size as the one that he had just left in a little greater haste than was pleasant. He was more cautious this time, but the result was as dispiriting as before.

When he reached the valley of the Yellowstone, he was among such stupendous exhibitions of the grandeur of nature, that he would have stopped more than once, overwhelmed with awe, had he not gazed on the same wonderful scenery before.

It was in the heart of this remarkable

country that Black Sam at last drew up his horse, under the belief that there was no use in going further.

“What’s the use, Screamer?” he said, addressing his animal as he was accustomed to do when they were alone. “It mought be that the varmints have come up this fur with the boy; but the chances are ’bout one in a hundred, and we can’t afford to do bus’ness on such a little cap’tal as that. No; I’m of the ’pinion, Screamer, that we are a good hundred miles off the trail, and we oughter turned back two or three days ago; but bein’ as we didn’t, the next best thing that we can do, are to do it now.”

A cool day was drawing to a close, and the horse, which had carried his master many hours, was pretty well tired out, for the travelling had been of the most difficult nature.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, and the trapper, who had overcome many an obstacle that would have checked others, was sensible of a feeling something akin to despair, as he looked back over more than a week of the severest kind of labor, spent all in vain, while the prospect of recovering his young friend

was further off, to all appearances, than ever.

The worst of it, too, was he could not make himself believe that there was reason to hope much from the attempt of MacGill. He was quite certain that if he went back to the appointed rendezvous empty-handed, his friend would do the same.

Sam spent two full days in travelling almost due west, so that when he headed southward he was north of the appointed rendezvous, and was thus altogether out of the line upon which he had started.

He was pressing southward, in his leisurely fashion, carefully noting everything that came under his eye, when he observed three Indians that had halted and kindled a small camp-fire in a ravine of slight depth.

There was nothing remarkable in this, but, while scanning them in an idle sort of way, he observed that they had a prisoner.

Supposing that he was some warrior, captured from one of the neighboring tribes, he still felt enough interest in his fate to dismount and steal down into the ravine, hoping that he might be able to lend him a helping hand.

"It looks to me as though them fellars war makin' ready to give that poor chap a roastin'. I make no doubt that he oughter, 'cause I never yet seed a redskin that it wouldn't do good, and make a better man of him, to give him a cookin' up in that style; but then that don't make no difference to me. What I see are one Injin down and three on top of him, and I'm goin' to sail in and help the under dog—that is, if thar's a show to do so."

He was making his way in his careful manner when a slight noise in the undergrowth warned him that some one was coming, and he had barely time to get out of the way, when one of the three Sioux came hurriedly along the ravine and quickly passed out of sight.

"That leaves me only two," said the trapper, "and if I can't get away with them, I hope they'll take my topknot with 'em."

A minute later, he had approached near enough to gain a good view of the redskins and their prisoner.

The amazement of Sam perhaps can be imagined when he discovered that the captive was nobody less than his old friend, Tom Mac-Gill!

"I might've knowed it," growled Sam. "If thar's any way of his getting into a scrape, he'll do it."

But as Tom was caught, it only remained for Sam to do his best to help him out.

And, furthermore, there was not much time to spare, either.

Why the third Indian had gone away, was more than he could surmise; but, fearful that he might return and complicate matters, Sam concluded to strike in, and do what he could before there was danger of such interference.

At a time like this there is nothing so effective as a sudden and perhaps false display of power.

Pausing but one full minute, Sam strode straight into the open space, and then, turning round, as if addressing some one behind him, he called out, in the Sioux tongue:

"Quick now, and we've got the Sioux dogs!"

The success of this audacious stratagem was complete.

Certain that a force of white men were coming, the two redskins darted off, as if they already saw them, and they vanished on the

instant, before indeed Tom comprehended what had taken place.

"Come, Mac," said Sam, "I guess that the best thing is to dust out of this place as quick as we can."

"Them's my sentiments," assented his friend, as the two left as hurriedly as they could.

But the Sioux had been so thoroughly scared that there was little to be feared from them, and the trappers were unmolested.

When they had reached a safe distance, Mac-Gill explained how it was that he came to be caught in such a predicament.

Like his comrade, he had reconnoitred several Indian settlements without success, when, on his return, he also laid out a new route for himself, and, going to the right, thus brought himself close to the course of Black Sam.

He conducted his task in as skilful a manner as his friend, so that his capture appeared to be a piece of his proverbial bad fortune.

He had lain down to rest, and, as near as he could judge, had slept an hour or so, when he was awakened by the whinny of his horse, and, starting up, found he was in the hands of the three Sioux.

The latter took his gun and animal, and were no doubt on their way to some one of their villages, when Sam appeared so opportunely on the scene.

In the hurry of their flight, the redskins left the gun behind, but the horse was irrecoverably gone.

"Sam," said MacGill, in an apathetic voice, "I think as a chap to steal a boy back from the varmints I'm a sort of failure."

"And I won't quarrel with you on that score," laughed Sam.

"If it's all the same to you, I'll back out and go to Omaha, so as to get ready fur next winter's trapping!"

"Wall, old boy, you've done the best you could, and I'll stick to my bargain."

And then Black Sam explained minutely the location of the golden rock, and told Tom that if he was of a mind to try his luck in digging a fortune from it, he was welcome to make all he could.

He assured him still further that if he failed in this venture, as he half expected he would, he would meet him in the course of a few months in Omaha, and make it up to him.

Poor Tom was only too glad to accept the kind offer of his friend, and, without his horse, he went off at once upon his new venture.

Sam turned, with undiminished ardor, to continue his hunt for the lost Dick Stoddard.

For more than three months, far into the summer, did the faithful trapper push his search for the boy, encountering all manner of perils. At the end of that time he made his way back to Omaha, without having met with the slightest success.

In the city, almost the first person whom he came across was Tom MacGill, who, he was glad to learn, had been favored with remarkably good fortune for once in his life.

He had found the golden rock, and managed to secure a supply of the precious metal, so that he was the richer by several thousand dollars.

Once more the two joined forces, and spent the following winter in the hunt for the stolen boy.

But with the same unvarying failure.

The search was kept up for a year and more. until they were forced to believe that the poor fellow was dead!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE YOUNG CAPTIVE.

WE go back to the morning when Black Sam, the trapper, went out to look at the golden rock, while Dick Stoddard started off to catch enough fish for the morning meal.

Dick could not be mistaken as to the meaning of the whoops and yells, and reports of guns.

He knew the Indians were there, and he believed, too, that Sam would not be able to maintain himself against them.

The question instantly came to him as to what he could do to escape a similar fate.

In accordance with the instruction from the trapper, the boy always carried his rifle with him, and he now determined to leave the neighborhood, and alone try to reach some fort.

The sounds of the guns and the shouts of the hostiles told him what direction *not* to take.

He accordingly moved off in precisely the

opposite course, stealing along with the caution of an Indian scout.

As yet, he had seen nothing of the redskins that were making all this mischief.

He had scarcely started, when all sounds of the tumult ceased.

A suspicion came over him that the trapper might have succeeded, after all, in eluding the savages, and that, as a consequence, it would be the worst thing he could do to seek to give him the slip in this fashion.

After debating the matter awhile with himself, he turned about and began carefully retracing his own steps, reaching the very spot that he had left but a short time before.

All was as still as the grave, and he was not a little puzzled to understand why it was so.

It appeared to him that he ought to see or hear something of Sam or the Sioux.

"Maybe they've killed or carried him off," he said to himself, as he stood on the very spot where a few minutes before he had caught the fish which were to furnish them with their morning meal. "If they have killed him, why, of course, I could not hear anything of him.

And I don't suppose if they were taking him away he would make any fuss over it."

Just then his fancies were broken in upon by the report of a rifle, sounding so near that he started and turned his head, believing that the Indian that fired it was within sight.

But, fortunately, the position of the youth was such that he could not be seen for any great distance from any direction.

Still Dick knew that the one who discharged the weapon was somewhere near, and he regretted that he had not kept on.

At the end of a few minutes, another shot told the whole story to the dreadfully frightened boy.

He knew that it came from the interior of the cave—that, in fact, Black Sam was firing from within at the Indians on the outside.

As the boy stood wondering and listening, he recalled that the trapper had told him he had been caught in this same manner on more than one occasion before, and that he was able in every case to fight off his assailants, and felt his ability to repeat the feat at any time they might attack him.

Such being the case, it was manifest that the

only safe thing for the boy to do was to keep out of sight until the Sioux gave it up and departed.

Dick had been in hiding but a short time, when, to his great terror, one of the warriors besieging the trapper appeared only a short distance away, walking directly toward him.

It seemed to the little fellow that there was no means of escape, and he raised the hammer of his rifle, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible; but, at the very moment when he was about to take aim, the Sioux turned about and walked away.

What it was that ever induced the Sioux to go in that direction was more than Dick could decide.

"It looks as if it isn't safe," he thought, as he cautiously crept toward a clump of bushes a short distance off. "I don't think they'll find me in this place," he added, as he shrank in as small a space as he could.

Here Dick stayed the entire day, so wrought up and anxious, that he was unaware of the passage of time until he observed night closing in around him.

During these trying hours he was kept in a

state of excitement by the occasional crack of a rifle, and on one or two instances he heard the defiant yell of Black Sam; but toward the latter part of the day these ceased.

The great nervous strain which he suffered made the youth insensible to hunger; but he became so thirsty that he ventured to steal out to the brook, and he helped himself to a revivifying draught of water, that did much to inspire him with renewed hope and courage.

"Sam has kept them from coming in, just as he did before," was his conclusion, as he crept back to the place; "and I guess they'll make up their minds by to-morrow that it is no use and will go off."

Cheered by this belief, he became more composed, and soon fell into slumber that was unbroken through the entire night.

When he awoke, the first thought that came to him was the conviction that he had made a sad mistake, and one, too, that was likely to prove fatal.

He had never thought of the rear entrance to the cavern.

"And Sam always had that to slip out by," he added, "and that is what he has done last

night when I was asleep. Why was it that I didn't think of it?" he asked himself, bitterly, as he believed that he had let the one great chance go.

"Maybe he is in there now," he said, as he crawled out of his hiding-place, "and is waiting for me to go to him; any ways, I'll try it."

Acting upon this impulse, he moved as carefully as he could in a direction that led toward the cavern.

On the way he saw and heard nothing of the Indians, and he was half persuaded that they had departed in the darkness.

It will be remembered that the outlet to the cavern was very hard to discover, which must have been the fact, or it could have been of no benefit to the individual who wished to use it.

Dick had seen the opening both from the inside and the outside, and yet, despite this, it took him a full hour to find it.

He hit it at last, and, after some hesitation, stealthily entered the dark and "spooky" opening, and crept slowly and carefully along toward the cavern itself.

He had forgotten the little stream of water to which we have referred in another place.

He was reminded of it when, as he was making his way forward in a slow, stealthy fashion, he suddenly placed one hand in the cold element.

He was so started for that moment, that he cried out and drew back.

But remembering what it was, he laughed at his own fears, and resumed his work of journeying onward through the blank darkness.

Threading his way along in this ghostly manner, he at last emerged into the cavern that had been his shelter for so many months during the dreary winter just passed.

Here the oppressive darkness was relieved by a few faint beams of light that straggled through the crevices in the rear where he had entered, and also by those that came in the larger opening at the main entrance.

The first thing he did was to pronounce the name of his friend, in a low voice.

This he repeated several times, gradually increasing in loudness, until there could be no doubt the words filled every portion of the cavern.

There was no response, for the person whom

he sought was at that moment many miles away, and increasing the distance every moment.

"I guess he is gone," muttered Dick, as he gave over the vain task; "he thought I was taken by the Indians, and there wasn't any use of looking for me."

Fully twenty-four hours had passed since the boy had eaten a mouthful of food, and he was nearly famished.

He remembered, even in his fear and trembling, that there was a supply of pemmican, upon which he had made many a meal, and he groped around until he found enough, which under the circumstances, was the best thing he could have secured.

His meal finished, Dick naturally asked himself what was the best course for him to take regarding his own safety.

The fact that he had succeeded in reaching the cavern without seeing anything of the Sioux led him to hope that they, too, had gone, and that if he chose to make an attempt to leave such a dangerous place he was free to do so.

If he only had a horse-path, he was quite

confident he could make his way to Omaha, or at least to Fort Adams.

A slight noise at the mouth of the cavern caused him to turn his head, and, to his inexpressible terror, a painted Sioux came crawling in.

The sight paralyzed Dick, until he recollected that he had a loaded rifle in his hand; but, before he could bring it to bear, he discovered that the redskin was closely followed by another.

This was rushing things so fast that, instead of firing, Dick turned and tried to make his escape by hurrying through the passage he had used in entering the cavern. It is safe to say that he went out a great deal faster than he entered.

But all his haste and effort availed him nothing.

No doubt the Sioux had seen him enter the narrow passage, and were content to play a while with him as the cat plays with the mouse, knowing there was no possibility of escape.

At the moment the boy came out of the opening, he found himself confronted by two other Indians.

When the young fugitive saw them, he felt it was all up, and there was no use of trying to get away or to resist.

Accordingly he stood still, and waited for his captors to come and do their will with him.

Among all these Sioux there was not a single one who could talk broken English.

Hitherto, those with whom Black Sam and Dick had been brought in contact knew enough to make themselves intelligible.

But now the case was the other way.

The universal language, under such circumstances, is pantomime.

The Sioux went at it with a vigor worthy of all success, accompanying it with their own gibberish, as though they thought to help the captive to a better understanding thereby.

Dick tried hard to learn what they were driving at, and suspected they were asking what had become of the trapper.

All that he could do in the way of reply was to shake his head and say, "Gone, gone!" for he was warranted in saying that much.

Sam was gone, beyond question, and Dick would have been glad if he could have known **whither, or, better yet, if he could have pos-**

essed the power of being "gone" at the same time.

There was something amusing in the action of the Sioux, who repeated the question fully a score of times, while Dick answered promptly, and in as loud a voice, with the single monosyllable.

Finally, they seemed to gather the fact that there was nothing to be gained, and they gave over the attempt.

The redskins were angry over the trick that the trapper had played upon them.

After they had succeeded in wounding him severely, he had not only paid them back with interest, but had fled in the night, when they felt certain they had him in their power.

But here was the boy, who must be a great favorite of his, and his capture would be a slight recompense.

It would be the easiest thing in the world to put him to the torture on the spot.

Sam was right when he concluded that, instead of doing so, they would take him away as a prisoner.

The Indians had horses, and made ready to leave the place at once.

The warriors that had fallen victims to the skill of the trapper were lifted upon the animals, a brave mounting behind each.

Dick was placed before a brawny savage, in such a way that he could not fall off if he tried to do so.

In this order the march was taken up, and the company started in almost due north.

One of the first proceedings of the immediate capture of the boy was to deprive him of his rifle.

Dick saw his gun pass from his possession with a pang.

It seemed, in a measure, as though it was knocking one of his mainstays of hope from under his feet.

The Sioux party started early and kept on until meridian, the warriors now and then exchanging a word with each other; but no consultation was necessary, and they frequently went an hour at a time without a word.

A dozen horsemen rode quietly along, as if they were all dead men, while three of them at least were as inanimate as so many logs of wood.

As Dick now and then glanced at the lolling

braves, held in position by those who had escaped the bullet of the enemy, he was filled with a dread which he had never known before. It was, perhaps, the continual presence of death in this form that thus affected him, and caused the thought to come again and again that the living would surely take some woful vengeance upon him.

He noticed that the party were following a well-beaten trail, as their animals went straight ahead.

At times the way was quite rugged and hard to travel, but the ponies scarcely ever showed any hesitation, and the progress made could not have been surpassed by much fleeter beasts unaccustomed to the work.

It was the fortune of Dick to be at the extreme end of the procession, so that he was given a good view of all that was going on.

It was, perhaps, an hour beyond noon when the leader gave an order to halt; on the instant, every horse came to a standstill, and the warriors threw themselves to the ground.

Two Indians immediately disappeared and were absent less than ten minutes, when the reports of their guns were heard almost to-

gether, and shortly after both appeared, each bearing on his shoulders an antelope. In a twinkling the game was dressed and cooking over the fire that was awaiting them.

The dinner was of a substantial nature, and the boy was permitted to eat all he could possibly desire, after which the journey was resumed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIFE AMONG THE SIOUX.

DICK was unable to tell what the general course was, but, as he afterward learned, quite a change was made, the leader turning the head of his horse more in a westerly course, from which it will be seen that the boy was taken into the field of search which by lot fell to Tom MacGill.

When the halt was made at dark, the same two hunters went off in quest of game, and came back with a fine supply of palatable fish.

"I think I'll get a chance to run away to-night," thought Dick, as he stretched out upon a blanket between two warriors. "They won't think I've any hope of escape and won't keep such a close watch over me. And then I can fool them by making believe I'm asleep, and slip off in the night with a good horse."

This was an excellent plan, and he was en-

couraged by the many instances that he had read of Indian prisoners escaping in that way.

Had the Sioux been in a hostile country, where there was danger of pursuit and attack, they would have taken many precautions with the captive.

All that was done was to place him in the position mentioned, and to stretch out before the camp-fire, which was allowed to smoulder and gradually die out as the night progressed.

No sentinels were stationed, the redskins relying on their well-trained ponies to notify them of the approach of danger, of which it may be said they had scarcely any.

Dick was determined to keep awake all night, or at least until those around were unconscious. He managed to do better than would have been expected under the circumstances.

The strong hope that was his served to keep off sleep for a time, and as he lay on the ground, with his eyes closed so as to deceive any who might be watching him, he soon became satisfied that all about him were unconscious.

He could hear their regular breathing, and when he took a stealthy peep, they were as motionless as sticks of wood.

"I guess they're asleep," he thought, as he raised his head and looked across at the figures stretched on the other side the fire.

To prevent all danger of detection, he waited a while longer, until sure the way was clear.

By this time the camp-fire had smouldered so low that the forms on the other side the flames were invisible; but at the moment when he rose in a quiet way, there was a twist of fire that threw a momentary illumination over the scene, and caused him to pause and wait for it to go down again.

Before it did so, Dick looked at the Indian next him, and his feelings may be imagined, perhaps, when he saw that the eyes of the warrior were wide open!

Dick said nothing, but just then he thought it would be wise to pretend he was unaware of the fact. So he took a gaze across the camp-fire, where he was edified by the sight of a Sioux sitting up and staring back at him in turn, as if he was ready to answer any question the captive might choose to ask.

Dick lay back again on the blanket, muttering to himself:

"The Indians don't sleep half as sound as I

thought, or it may be that they weren't asleep at all, and were waiting to see if I would try anything of the kind."

Whichever way it was, it was plain that there was no chance for the success of the plan that the boy had set his heart upon. All he could do was to wait till some other opportunity came.

"I don't believe they'll keep it up all night," he thought, as he lay wide-awake as ever, thinking over the great problem that now overtopped all others. "I'll shut my eyes again, and keep them shut for two or three hours, and then I'm sure they'll be sound asleep, and I'll get the chance to slip out and ride off on one of their best horses."

The first part of this programme Dick carried out to the letter.

He kept his eyes shut for the two hours he had fixed upon in his own mind.

But when the time was up he forgot to open them again.

In short, he was never more soundly asleep, and he remained in that state until broad daylight.

The journey of the next day was **very much**

like that already described, no halt being made until noon, when they all took dinner.

The course still continued northwest, the way becoming so rough that at times it was little more than climbing up the mountains and picking their course down again.

Then they threaded their way through ravines and gorges, and beside dizzy precipices, where Dick passed so near that he closed his eyes to shut out the sight.

He had seen and become accustomed to many impressive displays of the rugged grandeur of nature, but the Indian ponies performed feats of horsemanship that caused him to shudder.

When the sun set, the Sioux went into camp again, just as they did the night before.

"That's lucky," thought Dick; "for I'll get a better chance than I had last night, and they won't be expecting me to try it again."

But when he lay down after supper, he fell into his usual slumber, which, as before, was not broken through the entire night, though the Indians kept the camp-fire burning brightly.

The next morning was less than half gone, when the leader of the party gave three whoops,

that were responded to almost instantly by the same number from beyond a rocky ridge directly in front of them.

A few minutes after they rode up this ridge, and as they reached the top, all saw the Indian village spread out before them.

Dick could not but contemplate it with the greatest curiosity.

It was too small to be a town of any importance, containing no more than twenty lodges altogether.

These were arranged along the bank of a stream some thirty yards in width, the waters of which rushed impetuously from the side of a mountain.

Scarcely had the horsemen appeared, when the whole population came forth to meet them.

The reception was boisterous.

But as the company bore dead bodies of several brave warriors, there was more lamentation than rejoicing.

No one seemed to notice Dick.

The Indian who shared the steed with him rode quietly forward till he came opposite a small lodge near the middle of the village,

when he halted, sprang off his horse, and reaching up his hand, helped Dick to the ground. The boy obeyed and walked into the Indian dwelling, by pulling a buffalo-robe aside. When he looked around for the man who had brought him, he was not to be seen.

The house was of an oblong square in shape, made of a mixture of the branches of trees, sods of dirt, and the skins of animals.

At the further end was the fireplace, which was of the simplest description.

The outlet, or chimney, was a circular opening at the top, with nothing to prevent rain and snow from beating in upon the occupants.

Two or three buffalo-robcs at the side served as couches, and there was nothing visible in the way of stools or chairs.

"I suppose I'm to stay here," thought Dick, as he stood surveying his surroundings, "but I don't mean to stay long. They can't watch me all the time, and I'll give them the slip when they aren't thinking."

As he feared to meet the rabble on the outside, he concluded to stay within doors, as long as he was allowed to do so. Accordingly, he sat down upon one of the buffalo-robcs, and

tried to make himself comfortable until the excitement died out.

The uproar was frightful, and he shuddered more than once, imagining that it was coming so much nearer his lodge, that some of the redskins intended to enter and take vengeance upon him for the work of the trapper, Sam.

At the end of an hour the two long drooping buffalo-robcs that answered as doors were pulled aside, and his warrior companion stepped in. The savage spoke to him as he took a seat on the other side of the lodge; but, as it was in the Indian tongue, Dick was not able to make an intelligent answer.

The warrior said no more, but stretched out on the floor, drawing the robe up around him, as though he meant to treat himself to a nap. And this proved to be the case.

A few minutes later, he was breathing so deeply and regularly, that there could be no doubt of his somnolent condition.

Dick would have done the same, had he not been so wrought up by the novelty of his new situation, and by a dread that he was about to receive an unfriendly call from some of the enraged mourners.

The warrior slept for two hours, when he awoke and went out without noticing the captive.

"Well, I wonder if I'm to sit here all day," thought Dick, "or will they let me take a look outside."

There came a change before night, however.

When the afternoon was half gone, the same warrior returned, bringing with him a squaw, who, from her bent form and wrinkles, was probably his great-grandmother.

These two held a consultation for a few minutes, and then the old woman set to work building a fire.

Although of great age, she was lively and active.

When the fire was completed, she began to prepare a meal.

Besides the well-cooked game, which always forms part of the regular diet of the redskins, there was a preparation of some sort of wild fruit, the like of which Dick had never met before.

He found the taste quite pleasant, and using his fingers as knives and forks, just as the other

two did, he made a nourishing meal, and ate all that he wished and more than he really needed.

He still remained in the house as much as possible, for he could not free himself of a belief that he would be in danger if he ventured outside.

The only event of the afternoon and evening that Dick remembered was the visit of a warrior who spoke English better than any Indian he had ever known.

His skill, indeed, in that respect was remarkable.

He was a young brave, hardly grown, and seemed to be a brother of the one who had the boy in hand.

This Indian asked many questions of Dick, and among others his name.

When told, he did not act as if he had ever heard it.

When there seemed to be nothing left for him to learn, Dick timidly ventured to ask what the Sioux meant to do with him.

He learned that the Indians intended to keep him as long as he lived.

The young warrior then added that he was

to be adopted by the old lady, who needed a boy to help her in her work.

This was better news than the captive expected, and he took occasion to thank his informant.

He learned, also, that the entire household consisted of the old woman and her grandson.

The younger brave was also a relative.

But he was married, and, with his family occupied a lodge of his own.

After the departure of this English-speaking Sioux, Dick stretched out upon the buffalo-robe and slept until morning. The succeeding three days were trying ones to the captive.

The whole village was in mourning for that time, and the lamentations were enough to drive one distracted.

The boy, having ventured outside to take a look at the howling creatures, was suddenly set upon by two women, and dreadfully beaten.

It was a week before he recovered and went among the villagers again.

He seemed then to drop into place as a member of the Sioux family, and no one showed a disposition to harm him.

About two weeks after his capture a grand hunt was organized.

He was taken along by his adopted brother, much to the disgust of the old squaw.

This hunt was continued many days, and during his absence the village was reconnoitred by Tom MacGill, who, as a matter of course, went off with the impression that the lad belonged anywhere except at that particular settlement.

The location of the Sioux village was so secluded that Sam, in all the long hunt he made, never saw it but once.

He then had so little faith in the boy being there, that his reconnoissance was of a superficial character.

From the first, Dick was determined to escape, but he little dreamt that so long a time must pass before his chance would come.

The old squaw was never at a loss to find plenty of work for him to do, in providing wood, carrying water, and numerous other chores.

When he did not suit her, she belabored him with a stick or whatever came in her way.

There was little or no affiliation between Dick and the young Sioux around him.

They took pleasure in tormenting him whenever the chance came, and as nobody interfered with their amusement, the only thing the captive could do was to keep out of their reach as much as he could.

Most of them were larger and stronger than he, and in case of his attempting to take his own part, he would have had the whole pack on him, and so he was only wise in avoiding anything of the kind.

During the first six months he was frequently taken on hunting excursions; but he was more of a hindrance than a help, so he was left at home with the old squaw.

A full year passed, and still the coveted chance failed to appear.

He developed wonderfully.

There was something in this out-door life, and free pure air, that was just the thing for one of his years, and his health could not have been better.

He had long since given over all hope from his old friend Black Sam, the trapper.

Indeed he had come to the conclusion that the two would never meet again in this world.

As the weeks grew into months, he became

more cautious, until the danger was that of letting some good chance pass and becoming confirmed in the belief that he was fated to stay his natural life in captivity.

What he looked upon as indispensable to success were a gun and horse.

It was not until a long time after his capture that he was favored with a sight of the rifle taken from him when he fell into the hands of the war party; but one day, greatly to his surprise, it was placed in his possession by the Indian who talked English so well, the donor telling him he was at liberty to go on a hunt in the forest if he so desired.

Dick went, but he knew very well that the whole thing was a ruse to test him, and he took good care to return at night, as if no thought of running away had ever entered his head.

But, though long deferred, the day was to come for the attempt to be made

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT OF DICK.

Two years had passed, and Dick Stoddard was still a prisoner, apparently with no nearer prospect of escape than when he first came among the Sioux.

One year after his capture, the Indians moved two hundred miles northward, so that they were at no great distance from the line which divides the Dominion of Canada from our own country.

Here they halted, and settled into their old habits of life.

The second winter was one of terrible severity. Dick saw a dozen chances of getting away, but he did not dare make the attempt.

The Indians had a hard time to procure game to support life, and Dick suffered also. A constant roaring fire and an abundance of warm robes were all that saved him from freezing. There were weeks that recalled vividly the previous months that he and Sam had spent

among the trapping runs of the upper Yellowstone.

It would have been sure death for him to attempt to face those winds that came howling and moaning around the rocks and lodges, whirling the snow in eddies, the particles cutting the face like myriads of needles.

"There's no use of my trying to run away in the winter time," was his decision, "for I and my horse would freeze before we could get out of sight of the place. I must wait for summer or spring to make a start."

He affected to be well-satisfied with his state and his captors at last relaxed in a great measure their watchfulness over him.

He had laid his plans long before, and he was wise enough to resolve that nothing should tempt him to make his start until everything was in the exact shape to suit him.

Now and then the old squaw allowed him to wander off for a few hours' hunt with his rifle; but he had not dared to ask for a horse through dread that his object would be suspected. He was determined never to try to get away without a good horse to ride.

At last he hit upon a scheme.

He waited until the majority of the warriors were absent on a hunt.

They left behind, as a matter of course, a number of their horses, as they left the owners also.

Dick did his best to please the old squaw, by anticipating her wishes in the way of work, so that when he asked her in Indian if he might go on a short hunt in the forest, she made no objection, as Dick started off precisely as he had done on scores of occasions during the preceding two years.

He sauntered along in the most indifferent style, while no one who looked at him would have suspected that his heart was throbbing with the greatest hope of his life.

He had reached the end of the village, with the purpose of entering the woods, when he observed that an Indian boy, with a gun on his shoulder, was following him.

Dick knew him to be one of the worst lads in this branch of the Sioux, and one who had always shown a delight in tormenting him.

To take him as a companion would not only guarantee a collision between the two, but

would most effectually prevent the carrying out of the white boy's plan of escape.

Dick was in a sore strait, and believed for a few minutes that he would have to give over all hope of getting off till the morrow, but he recalled the ugly nature of the little Indian, and a happy thought struck him.

Pausing on the margin of the forest he asked him where he was going, to which inquiry he received a sullen answer that he was on the way for a hunt in the woods.

Dick then expressed great delight thereat, and begged the boy to go with him.

This was enough.

Although the dusky urchin had started out with the undoubted intention of accompanying the captive, yet now that it appeared his company would be agreeable, nothing could have induced him to go along.

Muttering some ill-natured expression, he turned off, and was soon lost to view in the forest.

Dick smiled as he saw how well his little plan had worked, while he sauntered toward the wood until he, too, was lost to sight from the direction of the village.

He never once looked behind him, till he was sure the act would not be seen by any one; and then, when he found he was alone, he stopped and peered around, to learn whether there was any likelihood of his being noticed by any Indians that might be wandering in the vicinity.

There did not seem to be, and he made an abrupt turn to the left.

Walking in this direction for a short distance, he reached a grazing ground of the horses, where there were nearly a score of ponies.

Dick knew them all, and was able to pick out the fleetest and most enduring.

"There he is," said he. "He belongs to the chief, and if he should overhaul me after trying to run away with his horse, wouldn't he make me dance?"

But the only way of doing anything was by some bold stroke like this; and, as the boy had included such a "dash" in his scheme, he began a cautious approach of the steed, which was grazing near the end of the tract with his bridle on, as if his owner intended to make speedy use of him.

The fleet-footed steed seemed disposed to resent the approach of the boy, but he was well trained, and as Dick used some signals that were employed by the chief in controlling the animal, he soon got within reach of his halter, and the next moment was astride of him.

He paused long enough to look around and learn whether any of his enemies saw him; but the way was clear, and he started the horse as fast through the forest as the nature of the ground would permit.

He had carefully employed the time spent on his former hunting excursions in acquainting himself with the country lying immediately to the south, and he had gained a good knowledge of the route for a dozen miles.

There were trails leading in every direction from the Sioux village, and Dick struck one of these and followed it with the utmost speed.

The horse had not been in service for several days, and was in so high spirits that he needed no urging on the part of his rider, anxious as he was to get forward as fast as possible.

As the beast warmed with the exercise, he whinnied with delight, and went at a headlong pace, Dick narrowly saving himself from being

swept from his back by the use of all the agility at his command.

For the first hour of his flight he was haunted by a dread that some one was pursuing him; and it is safe to say that he twisted his neck and looked around fully a hundred times during that period.

Several times he was certain he heard the sound of the hoofs of a pursuing horse, and once he was sure he caught the call of the squaw, as she shouted for him to do some work for her; but these were only freaks of imagination.

He kept the steed at high speed, and never drew rein until night was at hand.

Dismounting, he tied the animal to the limb of a tree, and ate a supper of cooked meat which he had managed to carry away.

At the same time, he gave the beast, upon which he depended to such an extent for his safety, plenty of room to feed upon the grass.

The night was very dark, but the boy knew the moon would be up in the course of an hour or two, and he waited for that, determined to keep up his flight to the last minute.

There was no danger now of his falling

asleep, when so much depended on his keeping awake; besides he had grown in mind as well as body during the last two years.

The weather was clear and mild, and after a while the round, full moon came up above the horizon. Leaping upon the back of his steed he took the trail again, and sped southward as fast as was safe or prudent.

He had studied his flight so long, that he had thought of nearly every danger he was likely to meet.

One of these that he held in special dread was the necessity that forced him to follow a well-marked trail, thereby exposing him to the danger of meeting some of the Indians returning to the village.

This peril served to retard his progress, for he frequently stopped to look and listen for the sound of the coming footsteps.

But the farther he got from the village the less likely was he to encounter his enemies; for they were apt to stop and go into camp rather than continue their journey late into the night when there was no need of doing so.

On the morrow the danger would be renewed, and would last for several days.

It was near midnight, and he was feeling more hope than had been since his starting, when he was alarmed by the action of his horse. He threw up his head and gave utterance to a faint whinny that could not have been heard more than a dozen yards away.

But the wide-awake fellow suspected what it meant, and instantly drew his animal to one side, forcing him into the bushes far enough to be invisible to any one who might be passing along the trail.

He had no sooner reached this shelter, than he heard the sound of hoofs in the path, and knew that a number of his enemies were near, and coming dangerously nearer every minute.

His whole fear now became a dread that his horse would reveal him to the redskins by repeating his whinny.

The beast was so well trained, that he would not do this if the horsemen belonged to another tribe, but Dick thought the steed would recognize them as his friends.

Closer and closer came the sound of the hoofs on the earth, the noise being muffled and so soft that, but for the signal of the animal, Dick

never would have detected his danger until it was too late.

It seemed to him as he sat on his horse, scarcely breathing, that the redskins would hear the beating of his heart, so great was his dread of his steed betraying him.

But it must have been that the beast did not suspect the identity of the party, for the boy himself was less quiet than he.

So far as Dick could judge, there were no more than five or six Indians, but, for all purposes, that number was as effective as a hundred, and held in as great fear by him.

Close as were his enemies, the terrified fugitive was unable to catch the least glimpse of a single form. They went by like so many goblins of the night, and were soon beyond hearing.

Dick waited some time after the sound of the hoofs died out before he ventured to return to the trail and resume his flight.

It was fortunate for him that the point where he met these hostiles was so deeply shaded that one's eyes were of no account, otherwise his discovery would have been inevitable.

After a time the young fugitive came out

into the moonlight again, when the speed was increased, and with little variation kept up till the sun appeared.

By this time he felt the need of rest, but he halted only for a short period, during which he ate some more of the "lunch" he had brought.

At noon he was so used-up, especially on account of the want of sleep, that he was compelled to halt.

Securing his steed to a limb, so that he was able to eat and drink from a small stream near at hand, Dick threw himself upon the ground and immediately fell asleep—his purpose being to resume his journey at moonrise.

But he and his animal were in more need of rest than he supposed, and he slept the entire afternoon and the following night, his eyes never opening until the sun was shining in his face.

He was half-frightened out of his wits, but the horse was quietly nibbling the grass, fully rested and ready for another severe strain upon his endurance. As quickly as possible, the boy was upon his back again, and urging him to his utmost.

"Like enough there's a whole lot of Indians close behind me," he muttered with a shudder, as he glanced affrightedly to the rear.

But none was to be seen, which might have been the case with his enemies within striking distance.

He had only a small portion of his "lunch" left, and he ate that while his horse was galloping forward. His next meal would have to be secured by his rifle.

At noon, he found that he was on quite an elevation, and he took the occasion to make as careful a survey as possible of the route behind him.

The air was clear and the view extended backward until terminated by an elevation all of two miles distant.

Following the path along which he had made his way, he failed to detect anything that looked like horsemen, and it seemed safe to assume that he had that much the start of all pursuers, whoever they might be.

But the eye of the boy was arrested by a black line of smoke ascending from the elevation which was the extreme limit of his vision.

The distance was too great for him to discover any signs of those who had kindled the fire.

"I'm sure the chief is there with a whole lot of warriors after me," muttered Dick, when he had contemplated the vapor for several minutes. "They aren't very far off, either, and I've got to make better time than I've done yet."

It is hardly probable that the fears of the lad were well-founded. But it was well he should be alarmed.

He did more effective travelling than he had done since starting.

The trail that he had been following so long now disappeared.

The signs or footprints gradually grew fainter, until they vanished altogether.

Why this was so can be explained by showing the manner in which these trails are made

When the Indians left their village for a hunt they went together until they were in the particular section in which they expected to take the game.

There they separated and hunted as the whim took them.

When they were ready to return home, they travelled in twos, threes, and all sorts of parties.

As all were aiming at the same destination many miles away, they gradually converged as they neared the village, until they finally struck the same line of approach to the lodges, and the various paths blended together.

The nearer the village the more plainly marked was the trail, and the farther off the fainter it became, until it vanished altogether.

During the afternoon, the fugitive took several chances to look back.

In no case was he able to detect the slightest sign of his pursuers.

This was by no means proof that he was free from danger from the Sioux he was trying so hard to leave behind.

He was sure they would do everything they could to recapture and punish him for the crime he had committed against them in not only running away, but in taking the best horse.

But it would not do for him to forget that there were other Indians in these parts besides those from which he was fleeing.

He was reminded of this fact just before nightfall by the discovery of another camp-fire, this time almost in front of him.

This, he was convinced, could not be caused by his pursuers.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

THE belief of Dick Stoddard that the camp-fire did not belong to his enemies led him to determine to find out to whom it did belong.

Riding as near as was prudent, he left his horse among the trees and undergrowth, and cautiously stole forward. One of the greatest surprises of his life followed a few minutes later.

Two white men, in the garb of hunters, were seated near a small blaze, smoking their pipes. They had evidently finished a meal a short time before, and were now enjoying themselves in characteristic fashion.

One of them was Black Sam, the trapper, and the other a stranger.

Without hesitation, Dick walked forward and saluted his old friend.

The meeting between them may be imagined.

At first, the old hunter did not recognize the tall, manly youth, but when he heard his voice and laugh, and looked a second time into his face, he leaped off his feet and wrung his hand till it ached.

"Are you sartin it is yourself, younker, or your ghost? I'm blessed if it ain't your own purty self. This is my friend, Tom MacGill," added Sam, still shaking the hand which he seemed unwilling to release.

The meeting was a most joyful one in every respect. The words of the three so crowded each other that it was a long time before anything like an understanding was reached. When Dick ventured to express some fears of being molested by Indians, Sam assured him there was no cause for fear. They understood the country thoroughly, and though there were Sioux at no great distance, they would come no nearer, at least not near enough to cause them trouble.

Then the boy sat down and told his story. Enough food was left to furnish him a good meal, and, at the suggestion of his friends, he brought his horse to the spot where their own animals were grazing.

It was a strange story which the youth had to relate, and the hunters had an interesting one of their own to tell. They had been working at the Golden Rock until they secured about all the precious metal it contained. There was enough to load several pack-horses, and they were now on their way back to the States with the valuable stuff.

It was like them to insist that Dick should accept a liberal portion, but he absolutely refused to take more than a small quantity. He felt he had no real claim on it, but since he possessed no means at all, he allowed his friends to present him with several hundred dollars' worth of ore.

Two week later, the party arrived in Omaha. Dick readily disposed of his portion, and then, as he had no ties binding him to the East, he expressed his determination to go to California, despite the woful experience he had already undergone. There was a feeling, as he expressed it, that it would be cowardly to give up after one failure. He took care, however, to join a company large and strong enough to protect itself against all manner of danger. He reached the Pacific slope in due time and made

his home there. The success which attended his young and mature manhood has already been made known in the "Introduction" to this ower true tale.

THE END.





